

ANTHONY

The Religious Tendency in the  
English Literary Criticism  
of the Seventeenth Century

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THE RELIGIOUS TENDENCY IN THE ENGLISH  
LITERARY CRITICISM OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

BY

MAMIE ELIZABETH ANTHONY

A. B. GREENVILLE COLLEGE, 1907

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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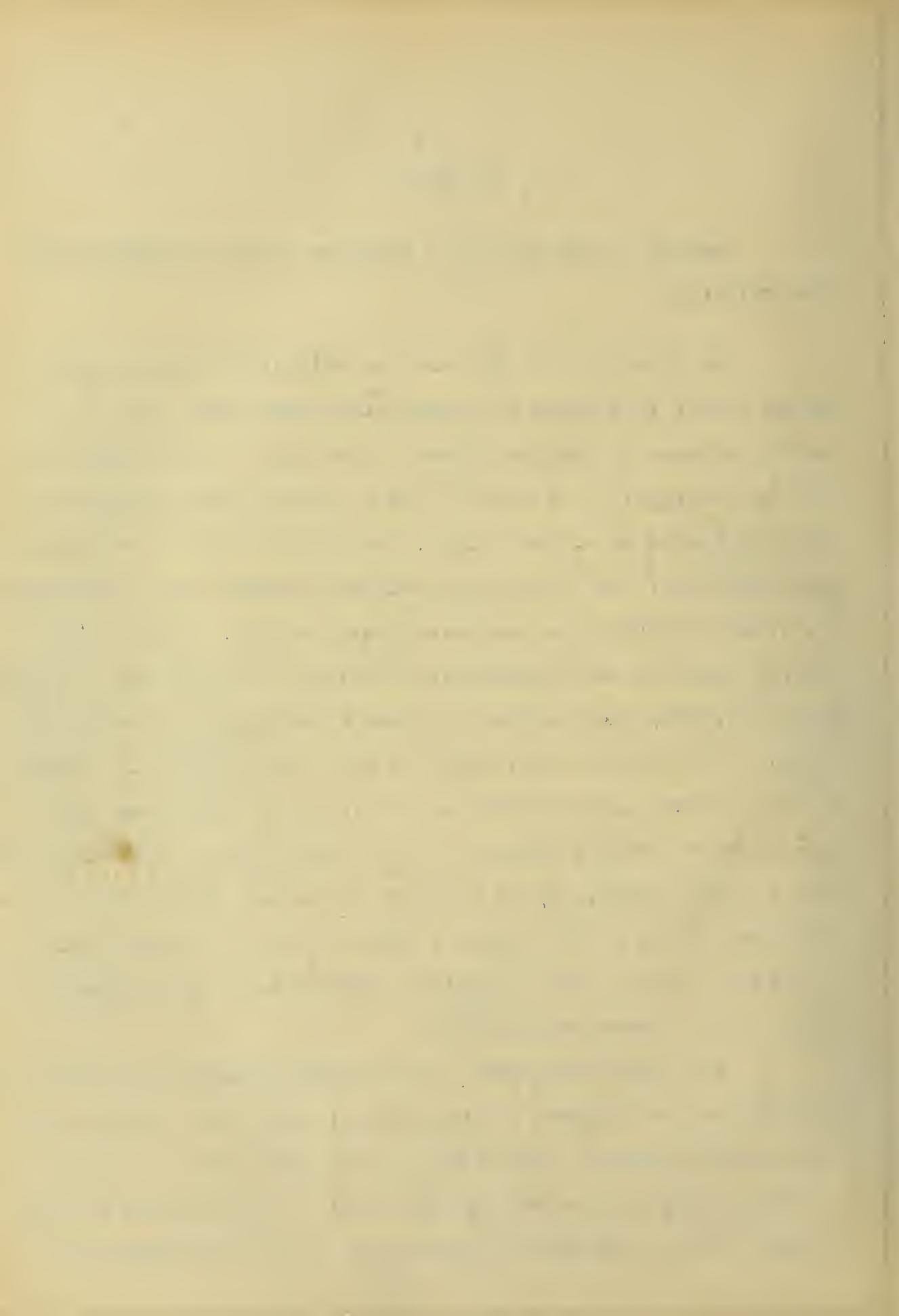


## CHAPTER I.

### SURVEY OF THE RELIGIOUS TENDENCY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM.

It is my aim to show how the religious tendency manifested itself in England throughout the seventeenth century in the development of English literary criticism. To do this, it will be necessary to consider to some extent early English literary criticism as to its origin, its nature, and its predominating tendencies, and to show the relation between these tendencies and those prevailing in the seventeenth century. Notice must also be taken of the contemporary criticism in Italy and in France, and of the influence exerted by these upon English literary criticism. The classical influence was also important in the century. We shall notice particularly the criticism in the latter part of the sixteenth century because; in the first place, with the latter part of this century modern literary criticism really had its beginnings; in the second place, a study of the criticism of the sixteenth century helps to explain tendencies of the critical spirit of the seventeenth century.

With the Renaissance new influences began to be felt in literature. The changes in the material world were reflected in the world of thought. The effect of the discovery of America was to stimulate and encourage the spirit of exploration and adventure, and the reflected influence of this in literature was



far reaching. Again, the protestations against the corruptions of the church and against the authority of the Pope were rendering insecure the fixed traditions, conventions, and doctrines of ages. The latter struggle determined, to a large extent, the nature of the literature and the bent of the critical temper in England. The general atmosphere of revolt was favorable to criticism, and it was in this atmosphere that the literary criticism of England, in the modern interpretation of the word, had its birth.

The Middle Ages were necessarily uncritical, when texts of any kind were decidedly lacking; the Renaissance was necessarily critical, with its dissatisfaction with mediaeval literature and its enthusiasm for the revival of classical learning and literature. With this revival the whole body of classical criticism was brought to light, though it was not studied much until the craving for classical knowledge had been in a measure satisfied.

England was one of the last countries to feel the influence of the Renaissance and English literary criticism was slow in developing. As the revolutionary changes in England were affected gradually and with little foreign influence, so English literary criticism was backward, and in its early history was singularly free from the influence of foreign criticism with its variety and abundance. It had no wealth of English tradition, and in fact little material upon which to work or exercise itself.

Several reasons for this are very evident. England was practically trilingual until the end of the fourteenth century.



Until Chaucer wrote, there was not one settled dialect of primary importance. The form of language was not yet established, and the work of an early writer could be only an experiment in literature. Almost three fourths of the sixteenth century had passed before any very considerable amount of literature had appeared in England. Then the study of scholastic rhetoric grew rapidly in importance, and literary productions increased in number.

The influence of the new Renaissance individualism was for the allowance of personal likes and dislikes. It brought about a recognition of the reasonableness of individual and of impressionistic criticism. There was a growing unwillingness to be guided by fixed, rigid rules. In general, very much freedom was allowed to the individual in his choice of subject and in his language, no one feeling himself competent to set up a positive standard by which the writings of others should be judged as right or wrong.

With the broadening view of literature, there was a recognition of the fact that ages may differ with regard to the matter and form of literary criticism. In England, Puttenham voiced the modern conception that criticism should give "special regard to all circumstances of the person, place, time, and purpose." In following this regulation the critic was free to

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1. Joseph Haslewood, Ancient Critical Essays upon English Poets and Poesy, London, 1811, I, 129.



express his personal opinions and to reflect in criticism the tendencies of the age by which he himself was affected.

In England, the religious tendency early found a large place in literary criticism. The strong impulse which that tendency received from the Puritan attack on literature, and the controversies resulting from that attack will be discussed later in this chapter.

The sources of the criticism of this period were in the main classical, French, and Italian. Elizabethan criticism shows very little of the influence of Plato, almost the only reference to him being the disputed passage concerning the expulsion of the poets from his commonwealth. The criticisms which show any attention to Plato discuss what his philosophical ideas were, rather than what influence his ideas of the fable and of poetry have had upon literature.

Sidney recognizes Plato, as a philosopher, indeed a poetical philosopher. With him we may notice how closely the religious tendency of the literary criticism in England was connected with the other tendencies. In the next paragraph St. Paul is quoted in equal authority with Plato and the attitudes of the two are compared:

"S. Paule himselfe, who (yet for the credite of Poets) alledgedeth twise two Poets, and one of them by the name of a Prophet, setteth a watchword upon Philosophy in-

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1. Gregory Smith, Elizabethan Critical Essays, Oxford, 1904, I, 190.



deede vpon the abuse. So dooth Plato vpon the abuse, not upon Poetrie. Plato found fault that the Poets of his time filled the worlde with ~~wrong~~ opinions of the Gods, making light tales of that unspotted essence and, therefore, would not have the youth depraved with such opinions. Heerin may much be said: let this suffice: the Poets dyd not induce such opinions, but dyd imitate those opinions already induced. For all the Greek stories can well testifie that the very religion of that time stood upon many, and many-fashioned Gods, not taught so by the Poets, but followed according to their nature of imitation. Who list may reade in Plutarch of the discourses of Isis and Osiris, of the cause why the oracles ceased, of the divine providence, and see whether the Theologie of that nation stood not vpon such dreames which the Poets indeed superstitiously observed, and truly (sith they had not the light of Christ) did much better in it then the Philosophers, who, shaking off superstition, brought in Atheisme. Plato therefore (whose authorite I had much rather iustly conster then uniustly resist) meant not in general of Poets, in those words of which Iulius Scalinger saith, Qua authoritate ad Poetas e republica exigendos; but only meant to driue out those wrong opinions of the Deitie (whereof now, without further law, Christianity hath taken away all the hurtful beliefe), perchance (as he thot) nourished by the then esteemed Poets."

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Puttenham also shows how unimportant the influence of Plato was, and with Sidney also emphasizes the religious tendency of the language of criticism:

"A poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conforms with the Greek word, for of *πολεῖν*, to make, they call a maker Poeta. Such as (by way of resemblance reverently) we may say of God; who without any trauell to his diuine imagination made all the world of nought, nor also by any paterne or mould, as the Platonicks with their  
1.  
Ideeis do phantastically suppose.

He goes on to speak of the Platonicks in such a manner as convinces one that the influence of Plato was not very great.

William Webbe in his Discourse of English Poetrie, 1586, refers in two places to Plato's explanation of rhythm; but what is of more importance in our discussion is Webb's idea of the divine nature and origin of poetry. The quotation we use shows both of these distinct tendencies:

"The beginning of it, as appeareth by Plato, was of a vertuous and most devout purpose; who witnesseth that by occasion of a meeting of a great company of young men, to solemnize the feasts which were called Panegeryca, and were wont to be celebrated euery fift yeere, there they that were the most pregnant in wytt, and undued with great gyfts of

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George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie, 1589, Ed. by Edward Arber, London, 1869. English Reprints VII, 19.



wysedom and knowledge in Musicke above the rest did use  
commonly to make goodly verses, measured according to the  
sweetest notes of Musicke, containing the prayse of some no-  
ble vertue, or of immortalitie, or of some such thing of  
greatest estimation which unto them seemed so heavenly and  
ioyous a thing that thinking such men to be inspyred with  
some diuine instinct from heaven, they called them vates.<sup>1.</sup>"

No doubt the ideas of Plato exerted influence upon the English through the French and the Italian, but they had become so absorbed that one does not recognize them as Plato's. These quotations just cited not only show how the ideas of Plato appealed to English critics, but also indicate how inseparably the religious element was bound up with the criticism of the latter part of the sixteenth century.

The influence of Horace and of Aristotle is greater than that of Plato. Euripides, Sophocles, Seneca, serve as models, though the references to these are chiefly with regard to rhetoric, the unity of time, and other classical views which do not concern us in this discussion. Cicero and Quintillian exert a critical influence in matters of rhetoric. Virgil, Plautus, and Terence are also in some measure critical aids.

Elizabethan literature also owed a large debt to the Italian; but <sup>to</sup> what extent Italy gave models or grounds of criticism,

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1. William Webbe, A Discourse of English Poetrie, 1586, Ed. by Edward Arber, London, 1870. English Reprints, III, 22.



it is difficult to determine. Between 1500 and 1600 Boccaccio's De Genealogia Deorum was very popular in Europe, and in it are set forth some of the principles of literary criticism which dominant during the later Renaissance, and which affected English literary criticism. While the Elizabethan critics were engaged in the defense of poetry, Italian critics were engaged with the same task. It would seem from this that there must be some relationship. In England, however, this problem for literary criticism was the result of an English influence, the Puritan attack upon poetry. In the search for the fundamental principles of poetry to use in the defence, to whom should they go more naturally than to the Italians from whom they had already learned much in the use of the fable or story, and in methods and manner of writing? Early in the sixteenth century scholars had been led to Italy by their desire to drink from the original source of the revived learning, and pilgrimages continued for more than a hundred years. The Italian influence was not slow in affecting the English, and an enthusiasm arose for Italian manners, fashions, metres, and literature. Minturno and Scaliger are the chief sources of criticism and are frequently cited by Harrington, Daniel and Sidney.

French literature was also known in England at this time, and in the French there are references of contemporary writers in England. A parallelism in the criticism exists which would lead one to the conclusion that both peoples had drawn from the same source. There are, however, some direct influences and



borrowings from the French by the English, particularly evident in the use of French words and metres. Du Bellay and Ronsard are the chief sources of French influence as opposed to the Italian.

1.  
The views of Gascoigne, and of James VI. in his Short Treatise  
2.  
on Verse suggest an influence. Puttenham shows himself very much indebted.

The interesting feature of the criticism of this century is that the critics borrowed both from what earlier English criticism they could find and from each other. Through this influence English literary criticism became natural and individual in tone, since it sprang largely from the English character and exhibited the national characteristics and tendencies. Ascham and Sidney are favorite sources, and the decided religious tendency they exhibited obtained largely both in the criticism of those who drew from them, and in that of succeeding critics.

Without digressing from our discussion of the religious tendency we may consider two periods of development in English literary criticism, both of which are accompanied by the expression of religious ideas. The first or formal period, characterized by the study of rhetoric and of metre begins with Leonard Coxe's  
3.  
Arte or Crafte of Rhetoryke compiled about 1524.

The most important of the critics who devoted themselves

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1. Haslewood, Ancient Critical Essays, II, 1-12.

2. G. Smith, Elizabethen Critical Essays, I, 208-225.

3. See reprint edited by Frederic Ives Carpenter, Chicago,



to the rhetorical study of literature were Sir Thomas Wilson, Sir John Cheke, and Roger Ascham. All of these men were admirers of the classic models and were decidedly opposed to French and Italian influences.

The first of this group of critics whom we shall discuss is Sir Thomas Wilson whose Arte of Rhetorike appeared in 1. 1853. It has been designated by Warton as "the first book or 2. system of criticism in our language." The author was a courtier, a statesman, and a scholar, and his opinions are important in the history of the English Renaissance. His three requirements for an orator; that he should teach, that he should delight, and that he should persuade are the same as the later stage controversialists require for the dramatist. He gives examples of different kinds of orations, some of which are translations, but the most of them productions of his own. He thus has frequent opportunities to show his zeal for the Reformation. His religious ardor is felt throughout the book and he frequently attacks English Catholocism. The conclusion of his model orations are not unlike those of sermons. In one, after commending two noblemen, Henry Duke of Suffolk and Lord Charles, his brother, he concludes: "Let vs fo speake of them, that our good reporte may warne vs, to followe their godly natures, and that laftly, we may enioye that inheritance, whereunto God hath prepared them and vs (that feare him) from the beginning. Amen." Another he ends with: "God grant vs of his grace.

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1. An edition of this has been recently edited by G. H. Mair, Oxford, 1909.

2. Thomas Warton, English Poetry, London, 1870, p. 841.



1. Amen." His frequent attacks made in these books against Catholicism was the cause of his arrest and torture for heresy.

The next critic is Sir John Cheke, one of the most learned men of his time, a translator, and a champion of the classic authors and models. He had been Greek lecturer at the University of Padua. He with Wilson and Ascham attacked the use of the classics and of foreign languages as a source of English vocabulary, and advocated the purity of the English language. In a letter to his friend Thomas Hoby who had translated Castiglione's Courtier 2.3. he states his position. He too, was very zealous for the Protestant religion and his zeal gives atmosphere to his criticism. 4.

The most important of this, <sup>group</sup> Roger Ascham, because of his humanistic beliefs and theories might be called the first English classicist. Yet he shows, on the other hand, a strong sympathy with the Puritanical principles. A decidedly religious tone is given to his criticism. He discusses the moral weakness of Italianate Englishmen. He bemoans the influence of books translated

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3. Ibid., p. 17.

1. Ibid., p. 29.

2. This was written as a preface to the translation.

3. In Ed. Arber, Introduction p. 5; or in Raleigh's ed. of Hoby (London 1900) pp. 12, 13.

4. He was forced in old age to public recantation of his religion. He died in humiliation and shame because of this.



from Italian into English. Commended by their titles, he thinks they do much to corrupt the manners of honest men.

"Ten Sermons at Paules Crosse do not so much good for mouyng men to trewe doctrine as one of those books do harme with inticing men to ill liuing. Yea, I say farder, those bookees tend not so much to corrupt honest liuing as tend to subuert trewe Religion. They open, not fond and common wayes to vice, but such subtle, cunnyng, new, and diuerse shifte, to carry yong willes to vanitie and yong willes to mischief, to teach old bawdes new schole poyntes, as the simple head of an Englishman is not hable to inuent, nor neuer was hard of in England before, yea when Papistrie ouerflowed all. Suffer these bookees to be read, and they shall soon displace all bookees of godly learnyng. For they, caryng the will to vanitie and marryng good manners, shall easily corrupt the mynde with ill opinions and false iudgement in doctrine; first to thinke ill of all truwe Religion, and at last to thinke nothyng of God hymselfe, one speciall pointe that is to be learned in Italie and Italian bookees."<sup>1.</sup> He maintains that the Italianate Englishmen bring home other faults, but none so great as those of religion. He was in Italy once himself but thanks God that he remained only nine days.<sup>2.</sup>

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1. Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster, English Reprints, Boston, 1888., p. 162.



One passage in particular forcibly shows both the classical and the religious tendency in Ascham's criticism:

"But behold the goodnesse of God's prouidence for learning.....Behold...how God's wisdome hath wrought, that of Academici and Peripiatetici; those that were wisest in judgment of matters and purest in uttering their myndes, the first and chiefest that wrote most and best in either tong, as Plato and Aristotle in Greeke, Tulle in Latin, be so either wholly or sufficiently left unto us as neuer knew yet scholer that gave himselfe to like and loue, and folowe chieflie those three Authors, but he proued both learned, wise, and also an honest man, if he ioyned with all the trawe doctrine of God's holie Bible, without the which the other three be but fine tooles in a fole or a mad man's hand."<sup>1.</sup>

The second period characterized by the study of metre began with Gascoigne's Notes of Instruction concerning the Making of English Verse, published in 1575. Other important works on English versification were Harvey's Letters on English Reformed Versifying, 1580; Webbe's Discourse of English Poetry, 1586; and Puttenham's Arte of English Poesie, 1589. Though the discussions were primarily on rhyme and the making of verse, the religious tendency was very evident, particularly in the treatment of the

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2. Ibid., p. 171.

1. Ibid., pp. 237-238.



origin of poetry and the choice of subject. Puttenham declares that the principle<sup>a</sup> subject of poetry should not be upon "vain conceits, or vicious, or infamous", but "the laud, honor, and glory of the immortall Gods", or "the worthy gestes of noble princes, the praise of vertue & reprocofe of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines, the reuealing of sciences & other profitable Arts, the redresse of boistrous & sturdie courages by perswasion, the consolation and repose of temperate myndes: finally the common solace of mankind in all his trauails and cares of this transitorie life."

Webbe expresses the doctrine, which is the direct result of the allegorical theory, that the object of poetry is delightful instruction. Truth is to be taught under the guise of the fable. The poet, in a pleasing way, draws men from vice and leads them to morality and virtue; and though he may in poetry show some pictures of vices, the intent is not that people should imitate them, but that they should be drawn from them, when they learn the consequential misfortune which comes upon the perpetrators. He then quotes the following lines from Sir Thomas Elyot:

"The Poet fashioneth by some pleasant meane,  
The speeche of children stable and unsure:  
Gulling their eares from wordes and thinges uncleane,  
Giuing to them precepts that are pure:  
Rebuking envy and wrath if it dure:  
Thinges well donne he can by example commend,

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To needy and sick he doth also his cure,  
To recomfort if aught he can amend."

The exact expression of Webbe's theory is that "poetry, as it is of it selfe, without abuse is not onely not unprofitable to the lives and studies of menne, but wonderfull, commendable, and of great excellencie. For nothing can be more acceptable to men, or rather to be wished <sup>than</sup> the sweete allurements to vertues, and commodious caueates from vices; of which Poetrie is exceeding plentifull, powring into gentle witts, not roughly and tiranicallie, but as it were with a louing authoritie."  
2.

Critics of less importance on this subject of the reli-  
gious element in poetry are Sir John Harrington, and Frances  
4. Meres. This formal criticism extended into the early seven-  
teenth century, being them represented by Thomas Campion, Sam-  
6. 7.  
uel Daniel, and Edmund Bolton.

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1. Ibid., II, 242.
2. William Webbe, Discourse of Englishe Poetrie, 1586.
- Arber's Reprints, III, 23.

3. A Preface, or rather a Briefe Apologie of Poetrie, and of the Author and Translator, prefixed to his translation of Orlando Furioso, London, 1591.

4. Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury, London, 1598. The second of a series of books beginning with Bodenham's Pohtenphuia, Wits Commonwealth. Meres writes upon religion and morality in the first part of the work.

5. Observations in the Arte of English Poesie, London, 1602.



Another phase of literary criticism in England during the sixteenth century was that of apologetic criticism called forth by the Puritan attack upon poetry. The criticisms on verse and rhyme, as influenced by classicism, continued for a time to accompany the Puritan criticism, and not infrequently the defences deal in the same discussion with questions both of religion and of literary form. The attacks of the classicists had nothing in common with those of the Puritans. Few espoused both causes at the same time with much vigor. The defence of poetry, however, rested upon men who were opposed to the beliefs of both classicists and Puritans. The Puritans were opposed to art and to literature as a form of art. They ~~des~~cried the pleasures of poetry except as they might minister to philosophical or ethical development. They considered that on the whole poetry was a corrupting influence in the church and in the state, decidedly against the pure doctrines of philosophy and religion. The defence of poetry was not only literary, but political, and ecclesiastical as well. To meet the attacks exactly and adequately, would require in the defendants an understanding of the principles of poetry, <sup>and</sup> of the

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6. A Defence of Ryme, Against a Pamphlet entitled: Observations in the Art of English Poesie, London, 1603. See in (Complete) Works, edited by A. B. Grosart, London, 1885-96. (5v.)

7. Hypercritica, or a Rule of Judgment for writing or reading our History's, 1615-1617. Reprinted by Haslewood, London, 1815, II, 221-254.



fundamental principles of life.

The Puritans had called forth and demanded the solution of a larger problem than they were aware of doing. They furnished the first occasion for English literary criticism and gave it the religious tendency which became strongly characteristic of it during the seventeenth century. The importance of the Puritan side of the controversy concerning poetry lies not so much in the arguments, as in the fact that these arguments were taken up by more able men, and the cause of literature was thus defended and strengthened. The arguments were not only met but real principles of literary discussion were defined, and many faults of literature corrected.

The Puritan arguments were on both historical and on moral grounds, though the historical is of less importance. All the weight of both sound and perverted tradition was brought to bear against stage plays and songs. The church fathers, Augustine, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactanius, and Chrysostom breathe their influence through the din and persistency of these enthusiastic partisans of religion. Sentences and phrases were quoted for the proof of doctrines, though often twisted into a very different meaning than they had first had. The moral side of the argument bore directly against the theatre and its associations. The following table given by Gregory Smith in his Elizabethan Critical Essays will convey sufficient idea of the general nature and development of the anti-stage controversy.



1577. John Northbrooke enters his Treatise wherein Dic-  
ing, Dauncing, vaine Playes or Enterluds, with other idle  
Pastimes &c., commonly used on the Sabaoth Day, are reproved  
1579. by the Authoritie of the Word of God and auntient Writers.

1579. The Schoole of Abuse Conteining a pleasant invective  
against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and such like Catter-  
pillars of a Commonwelth; setting up the Flagge of Defiance  
to their mischieuous exercise, and ouerthrowing their Bul-  
warkes, by Prophane Writers, Naturall reason, and common Ex-  
perience....By Stephan Gosson. Stud. Oxon.

1579. Strange News out of Affrick. A Defence of the  
stage, of which nothing is known except the account given  
by Gosson in his Emphemerides.

1579. A Short Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse, against  
Poets, Pipers, Players, and their Excuses, by Gosson.

1579. Lodge's Defence

1579. The Play of Playes, an unknown Defence, described  
by Gosson in the Fourth Action of his Playes Confuted.

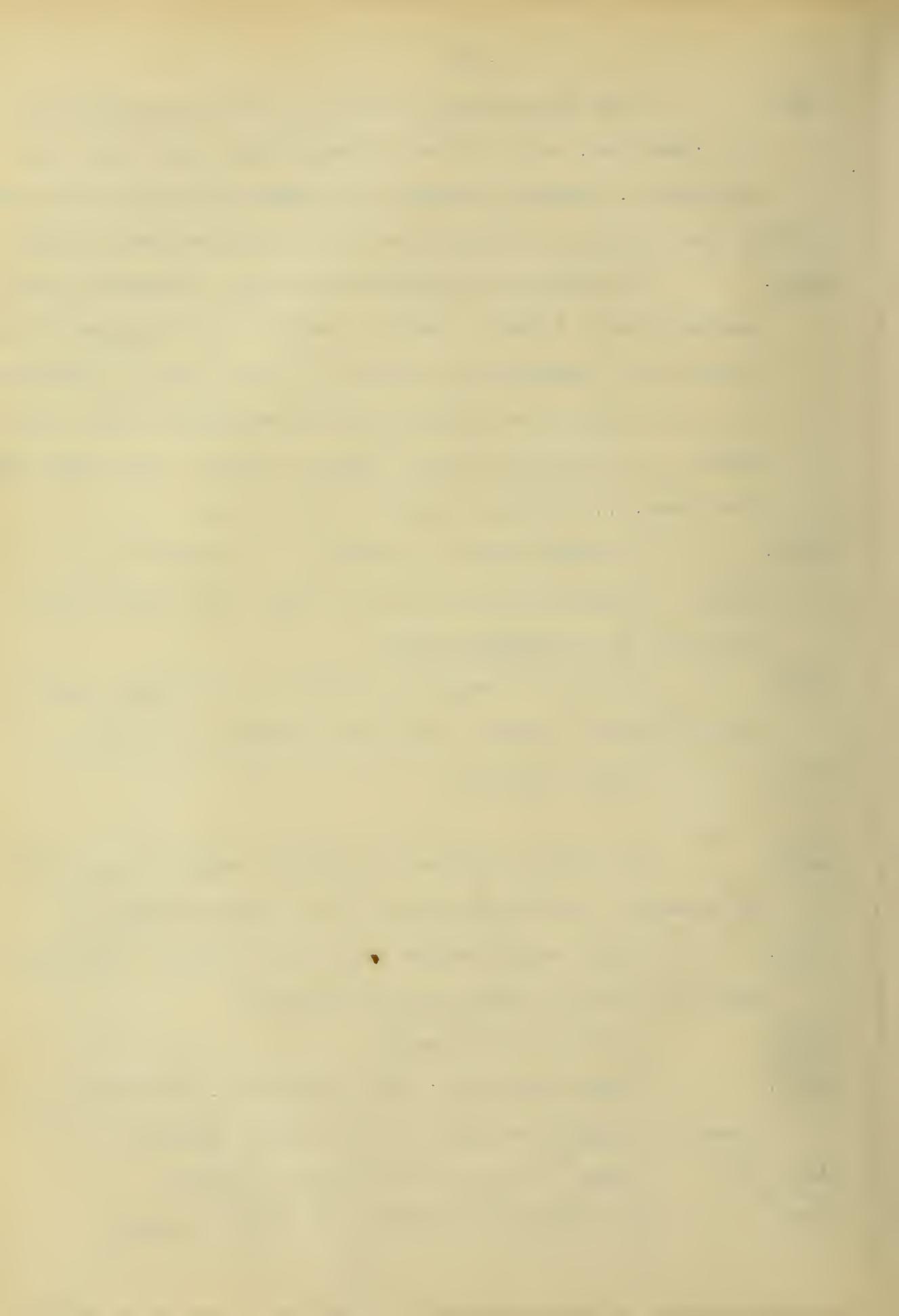
1580. Henry Denham enters his tract, A Second and Third  
Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres.

1581. A Treatise of Daunses

1581. Playes confuted in five Actions &c., by Gosson in  
answer to Lodge's Defence and the Play of Playes.

1581-3. Sidney writing his Apologie or Defence.

1583. The Anatomie of Abuses, by Philip Stubbes.



1584. A Touchstone for the Time, by George Whetstone.

1587. A Mirrour of Monsters, by William Rankins. The <sup>1st</sup> last three being anti-stage.

The real beginning of the controversy was with Gosson's 2.3.

Schoole of Abuse, a Puritan attack upon poetry, music, and the drama, After spending some time at Oxford he had come to London in 1576, where he became a player and a writer of plays and poetry. The popularity of his plays was later a source of confusion to him, for while he was hurling invectives against the stage, there came bounding back to him his own successful ventures in the profession which he was defaming. He was a reformer and idealist.

Looking back to the good old days of England, he contrasts them with his own times when England has "robbed Greece of gluttony, Italy of wantonness, Spain of pride, France of deceit, and

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1. Vol. I, pp. 61-63.

2. Edmund Gosse in Seventeenth Century Studies styles The Schoole of Abuse, "a puritanical attempt to nip in the bud the whole new blossom of English literature. It was not inspired, as were the attacks of Jeremy Collier a century later, by the righteous anger of a not very imaginative man who saw the wickedness of the stage without noticing its poetry; it was merely the snarl of a dull cleric who hated all that was urbane and graceful for its own sake."

3. Arber's English Reprints IV, 19-54.



Dutchland of quaffing.<sup>1</sup> "The evidences of these evil conditions he finds in poetry and the drama. He is not for wholly banishing poetry. He praises that which makes for morality, but dwells most ly on the abuses of poetry;

"This haue I set downe of the abuses of Poets, Pyp-  
ers, and Players which bringe vs too pleasure, slouth. sleepe,  
sinne, and without repentance to death and the Deuill: which  
I haue not confirmed by authoritie of the Scriptures, be-  
cause they are not able to stand vppe in the fighte of God:  
and sithens they dare not abide the field, where the word of  
God dooth bidde them battgyle, but run to Antiquityes (though  
nothing be more ancient then Holy Scriptures) I haue given  
them a volley of prophane writers to begin ne the skirmishe,  
and doone my endeauer to beate them from their holdes with  
2.  
their owne weapons."

"But that God that neither slumbreth nor sleepeth,  
for the loue of Israel, that stretcheth out his armes from  
morning to euening to couer his children, (as the Hen doth h  
her chicken with the shadow of her wings) with the breath of  
his mouth shall ouerthrow them, with their own snares shall  
ouertake them, and hang them up by the haire of their own  
3.  
deuises."

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1. Ibid., p. 34.
2. Ibid., p. 42.
3. Ibid., p. 50.



Unwisely and unfortunately for himself, he dedicated his book to Sir Philip Sidney without asking permission. Very soon Sidney wrote his Apology for Poetry which relieved him from the false position in which Gosson had placed him. Gosson may not have known of Sidney's Apology, for later in the same year he published his Apology for the School of Abuse, and dedicated it to Sidney.

Another of the more important controversial works was Lodge's Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays. The author voices the same allegorical conception of poetry as Puttenham and Webbe. He considers poetry as a divine gift and as one to be condemned only when it is abused. His point of view was identically the same as that of his opponent, Gosson. The difference was that while Lodge emphasized almost wholly the ideal state of poetry, Gosson could see little else besides the debased condition into which he thought it had fallen.

Sir Philip Sidney, and Sir John Harrington endeavored to answer the arguments against the demoralizing effects of poetry, showing that it and religion are not antagonistic, but serve the same purpose, that of inspiring individuals to imitate the "excellencies of God." Sidney expresses this thought beautifully:

"The chiefe both in antiquitie and excellencie

were they that did imitate the inconciuable excellencies of God. Such were Dauid in his Psalms, Salomon in his song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Prouerbs, Moses and De-



borah on their Hymnes, and the writer of Job; which, beside other, the learned Emmanuel Tremelius and Franciscus Junius doe entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the holie Ghost in due holy reverence. In this kinde, though in full wrong diuinitie, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his hymnes, and many other, both Greekes and Romaines: and this Poesie must be used, by whosoever will follow S. James, his counsell, in singing Psalms when they are merry: and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some, when in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sinnes, they find the consolation of the neuer-leauing goodness.<sup>1.</sup>

"Poetry", continues Sidney, "is an art of imitation... that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting of figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture with this end, to teach and delight."<sup>2.</sup> He takes the usual attitude of the humanists that "virtuous action is the end of all learning", and again opens the much discussed question as to which is worthy of the greatest consideration, the poet, the philosopher, or the historian. Sidney argues that while the philosopher teaches by precept alone, and the historian by example alone, the poet teaches by both precept and example, and sets forth "the highest

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1. Sir Philip Sidney, An Apologie for Poetrie, London, 1868.
2. Ibid., p. 26.



and the noblest form of human wisdom."

He then proceeds to answer Gosson's objections to poetry, two of which are that it is the mother of lies, and that a man might spend his time more profitably than in the reading of it. Sidney maintains that the first objection cannot be valid since poetry never affirms, but merely presents things as fables or imitations. As to the other objection, since it has been proven that poetry is the highest form of wisdom, in that it most effectively teaches virtue, a man can spend his time in no more profitable way than in the reading of it.

Harrington's Defence of Poetry has very much in common with that of Sidney, although the author emphasizes more the allegorical interpretation of literature. The discussion receives more of the stamp of the moral and religious author. Although to the Christian all studies of poetry as well as of philosophy are but vanity, yet he regards the former as an aid toward the higher contemplation of God and of his divinity. Therefore, poets are in fact popular philosophers and divines.

The result of this controversy was to bring about a greater influence in literary criticism. Although before and even during the first half of the sixteenth century, there was no real literary criticism in England, the influence of the Renaissance had caused the growth of quite an estimable amount of criticism. Because of its comparative freedom from continental influences, it took a unique character and embodied to a great extent the tendencies of the English national and religious



life. Most of the defenders of poetry were men of decided religious beliefs, and in the consideration of literature were not unmindful of their heavenly vision. Thus we see how deeply the religious tendency of the English people had affected English literary criticism by the end of the sixteenth century. To trace the further development of this tendency and to show in what different ways it manifested itself in literary criticism shall be the aim pursued in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER II.

### TENDENCIES IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE.

At the close of the sixteenth century the Italian models were still influencing both the style and the subject matter of English literature; and to some extent, the French influence was also felt. Again, English politics and religion were receiving more and more consideration, and the religious ideas especially were giving to English literary criticism an individual character. At different periods during the seventeenth century we find one of these three tendencies above mentioned predominating. The Italian influence prevailed through the first part of the century, the Puritan through the mid-century period, and the French from the Restoration until the close of the century. Thus we may conveniently and quite definitely divide the literature and the literary criticism of the seventeenth century into three periods corresponding to the times when these three influences were having their greatest effect:

- I. The Early Seventeenth Century Period, extending from 1600 to the closing of the theatres in 1642, when Italian influence was predominant.
- II. The Age of Milton, or Commonwealth Period, extending from 1642 to the Restoration in 1660, when Puritan influence was predominant.
- III. The Age of Dryden, or Restoration Period, ex-



tending from 1660 to about 1700, when (the) French influence was predominant.

As we have noticed before, the strongest influence upon English literary criticism during the first part of the seventeenth century was the Italian; from Italy the literary criticism of England had its origin and knowledge of critical rules and theories. Later, when the formal treatises had come to exercise less influence on the temper of English criticism, other Italian tendencies, not so evident, though just as powerful, made themselves felt. Among these is the doctrine of Neo-platonism as applied to the interpretation of poetry, one of the most important of Italian influences, which with others was dominant until after the closing of the theatres, when the Puritan influence strongly asserted itself. This Neo-platonism, however, was manifested strongly, in the latter half of the century also.

The second great predominating influence in the English literary criticism of the seventeenth century was Puritanism, which became predominant in the mid-century. Although in Elizabethan times Puritanism had made a strong appeal to the English people, it left but little impression upon literature. The same conditions obtained through the first part of the seventeenth century; though the national temper was strongly influenced by Puritanism, the literary record of its passionate intensity is comparatively small until the first forty years of the century had passed. Religious struggles rather than literary activities engrossed the people. In the early years of the century



Puritanism found its ideals of right and of rights more and more at variance with the civil and ecclesiastical laws of England; and finally, as it grew insistent in its assertions and demands, civil war became inevitable. The Puritans prevailed and impressed the life and literature of the mid-century with their ideals. Among them there stands out one man who is preeminently and incontestably great in literature. But aside from Milton, Bunyan, and possibly Marvell, there was hardly another Puritan whose strength and grandeur made a lasting impression upon succeeding writers.

The third predominating influence in English literary criticism during the seventeenth century is that of the French. It had been early felt but it was not until in the second half of the seventeenth century that it became to any extent dominant. With the Restoration there came a breaking away from the restraints of Puritanism, although, in a sense, the classics came to be more highly valued, and the so called classical standards to be more highly venerated. Then, during the period of the Commonwealth, many of the literary men of England holding loyalist views went to France, where they became so influenced by the French style of literature that upon their return home they could no longer enjoy English poetry and plays. Evelyn records in his Diary at this time: "I saw Hamlet played; but now the old plays begin to distrust this refined age, since his Majesty's being so long abroad." While in exile in France

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many of the people became confirmed in the French tendencies with which they had been somewhat familiar at home. through correspondence between England and France. Then the Puritan rule in England contributed much to the encouragement of French influence at the Restoration. A reaction was inevitable after the severity and narrowness of the Commonwealth period.

The ingress of French influence came with Charles II., who brought with him at the Restoration, French companions and French tastes. French influence was felt everywhere, in science, in art, in medicine, in painting, in architecture, in music, and in literature. Men of culture, such as Butler, Cowley, Dryden, and Etheredge were acquainted with the French language. Criticisms of French literature were written by Dryden, Rymer, Bossuet, Fenelon, Malherbe, Corneille, Racine, and Molier. Boileau and Corneille had developed the art of criticism in France, and from them Dryden, whom Johnson calls the father of English criticism, derived his theories for judging of ancient and modern poets. In France, there had arisen among self satisfied courtiers and scholars a spirit which prompted to a modernization of the classics to make them conform to existing notions and ideas of life. Corneille, Racine, Boileau, Bossuet, and others protested and there arose the controversy concerning the relative merits of the ancients and the moderns. After the Restoration, this controversy was carried into England.

But the greatest factor in seventeenth century literature is the surge of religious feeling and passion which moves



and agitates all other currents everywhere. After the Reformation had spent its force in the sixteenth century, a sort of Counter-Reformation arose in the seventeenth century, and Protestantism was engaged, sometimes in a struggle with the Catholic reaction which was intent on setting in order the Roman Church, yet at other times the two movements reenforced each other.

The movement accomplished in Italy a change from the anti-religious tendencies of the Renaissance and brought into literature a tone of reverence and piety. In France, scepticism and liberalism declined rapidly, and Catholicism and Classicism advanced side by side. Corneille, Racine, and Arnauld showed in their writings the religious tone characteristic of their age. In Holland, there was a deeply religious strain running through the poetry of this period. Huyghens, Cat, Camphuysen, and Von der Wiele were religious poets whose purpose was to instruct and edify their people. Brederoo and Luiken were both authors of pious as well as humorous songs.

In England, during the seventeenth century, the most striking and complex religious currents are evident in both verse and prose writings. The strife between Catholicism and Protestantism was there modified by the via media position which the Anglican Church took between pure Protestantism and traditional Catholicism. Whatever may have been its value to religion, the freedom resulting from the Anglo-Catholic position was of great value to English literature.

Yet the religious tendencies of the century were not confined to the Catholics, the Anglicans, and the Protestants.



From the conflict of religious creeds and beliefs there arose the Presbyterians, the Puritans, and the Cambridge Platonists. The religious thought of the century increased, as some men turned to strict orthodoxy, some to more liberal views, and others to mystical pietism.

The existence in England of so many religious parties inevitably brought about much religious controversy, and in this kind of literature the religious tendency of the century is most often manifested. The character writings of Hall, Overbury, Earle, Breton, and others show the religious attitude of the period, in their near approach to a type of sermon literature. Aside from the sermons, religious prose and controversial discussions, the religious tendency of the seventeenth century was manifested in the paraphrasing of the Scriptures. Sir Philip Sidney had been fond of Paraphrasing the Psalms, and in this kind of literary effort he was followed in the seventeenth century by Fletcher, George Herbert, Sternhold, Hopkins, Sandys and others. Sonnets, hymns, and lyrics also reflect the religious temper of the times. The abundance of religious poems, together with the quaint emblems of Francis Quarles and other writers gave great satisfaction to the people. Although a number of authors attempted to write religious epics, only Giles Fletcher and Milton were in any great degree successful.

Thus the religious tendency manifested itself in various ways in literature. It is evident in the national temper throughout the whole country; although other characterizing



tendencies define the century into quite definite periods, yet through all of them the religious element is prominent. To facilitate the discussion of the religious tendencies in the literary criticism of the century, we shall employ the division into the periods mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

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### CHAPTER III.

EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PERIOD, EXTENDING FROM

1600 TO THE CLOSING OF THE THEATRES IN 1642.

Among other characteristic political movements in the Early Seventeenth Century Period was the attempt of James I. to establish his theory that the king receives his authority (to rule) directly from God and is not dependent upon the will of the people for his right to rule over them. Charles I. adopted this theory and developed it to the extreme. With the support of the high church clergy, the king, professing to be the representative of God on earth, promised that eternal punishment should rest upon those who should resist his will. His arbitrary measures and deeds of oppression brought about the hatred of despotism which resulted in his own destruction. The power and determination of the people increased. The Puritan love of freedom gained attention, and there was a steady progress in the growth of Puritanism in spite of all the measures that could be taken by the king and clergymen to check and destroy the movement. It was a time of struggle and controversy when political and religious forces were at work, which profoundly stirred the nation and ultimately brought about the Civil Wars.

The great writers of the preceding period were en-



gaged with secular themes and touched upon religion incidentally. Writers of this and the following periods were busied to a great extent both with theological beliefs, and religious doctrine and experience. Political and religious elements long antagonistic had gathered strength and now came to open conflict. The opposition to the existing government centred among the Puritans and Independents, in the House of Commons. These liberal parties stood for constitutional government, which position was consistent with their ideas of church government, where the congregation was the source of authority. Through persecution under Elizabeth and under James I., the Puritans developed a steady determination and courage, which, added to their deep convictions of individual liberty, made them strong opponents of despotism and advocates of emancipation from eternal authority in matters of civil and religious life.

However beneficial Puritan ideas may have been to government, they were not favorable to literature. In the age of Elizabeth Puritan ideals had not been permitted to come to the surface of literature in any strong, permanent way. During this period the national temper began to be strongly influenced by religious ideas, and as a result poetry and prose show the effect of a quickening of the individual consciousness. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Reformation had already severed England from Rome and established Protestant tradition. The leaders of the movement in England insisted that all truth was to be found in the Bible. Since this truth was often in need of interpretation to make it comprehensible, there



was a renewed interest in preaching. The exposition of divine precepts became all absorbing; the tendency was toward casting aside all the distractions of formal ritual, vestments, art, and music as being too much in harmony with this evil world.  
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The Puritans set themselves against the theatre and every other form of amusement. "The very pastimes of the world," says Green in his History of the English People, "had to conform themselves to the law of God. There were no more races, no more bull-baitings, no more cock fighting, no more dances under the Maypole. Christmas had to pass without its junketings, or mummers, or mince pies." They rejected the beauties of poetry and the drama." "In the years when all the wealth of Elizabethan literature.....enriched the world; in the years when, whatever its errors and vices, the surface of English life glowed with a pageant like brilliancy which has hardly been shadowed in later times, the Puritans, plain in dress, severe in aspect, often rude in phrase, produced-at least in so characteristic a form that we can assert it all and only theirs - little other than endless acrid, crabbed sermons, or pamphlets or books of controversy. To understand how these men, even in imagination, too, were brethren of the generation which, in other ways, added most of all during those before us to the imaginative wealth of our common race, needs nowadays an effort of imagination in  
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ourselves." --000--

1. Barrett Wendell, The Temper of the Seventeenth Century in English Literature, New York, 1904, Chapter VIII.



To be exact, the literary criticism of the seventeenth century begins with the book of William Vaughan entitled The Golden-groue. Its three books of sixty-nine, thirty, and seventy chapters respectively are really a continuation of the same kind of criticism which had been made in the sixteenth century by Sidney, Ascham, and others. In Book I, Chapter 51, Whether Stage Plays ought to be suffered in a Commonwealth, where the discussion of plays is taken up without reference to any literary problem, but they are rallied against as folly and wickedness. In Book III, Chapter 42, which is a discussion of Poetry and the excellency thereof, he treats of the divine origin of poetry in a manner decidedly trite. Moses and Deborah, he declares were the first poets and also the first teachers of knowledge to the heathen. Poets were the first priests, and the first to "obserue the secrete operations of nature." He agrees with Sidney, whom he considers the most excellent of all English poets, both in style and matter, that it is not poetry, but its abuse which should be censured and abolished.

The first important contributor to the religious tone in literary criticism in the seventeenth century is Giles Fletcher, known early in the century for his religious poems, chief among which is Christ's Victorie and Triumph in Heaven and Earth, which is supposed to have influenced Milton in the writing of his Paradise Lost. Fletcher agrees with Jonson that not every one can judge rightly of poetry. Among even the few who are thus competent, there are some who think it half profane to deal with divine and heavenly subjects in poetry. He wonders



if such critics would desire the sacred songs of Moses, Deborah, Jeremiah, Mary, Simeon, David, and Solomon to be rejected from the Canon as not sufficiently grave to belong there. "But it may be, they will give the Spirit of God leave to breath through what pipe it please, & will confesse, because they must needs bee,  
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as their Fountaine is, most holy."

Though the poet may not expect to compare with God, Fletcher continues, yet he may be commended in the attempt to imitate God. Nazianzen, one of the prominent leaders in the Greek Church, wrote many divine poems of which Basil approved because they won men to religion. Prudentius did not let a night or day pass without composing some divine song; Sedulius wrote the history of Christ in verse; Nonnius translated the Gospel of Saint John into Greek poetry; Sananzar spent ten years in writing a song on Christ's nativity; Bartas and Edmund Spencer gave their whole lives to this stucy. "Saincte Paule, by the Example of Christ, that wente singing to mounte Olivet, with his

Disciples, after His last sup(p)er, exciteth the Christians to  
solace themselves with hymnes, and Psalmes, and spiritual songs.<sup>2</sup>  
And with due regard to these critics, Fletcher adds, "be it  
an Error for Poets to be Divines, I had rather err with the

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1. Author of the divine epic, Christ's Victorie and Triumph, from which it is thought Milton received suggestions.
2. Ibid., p.115.



Scripture, then be rectifi'd by them: I had rather adore the stepps of Nazianzen, Prudentius, Sedulius, then followe their stepps, to bee misguidid; I had rather be the deuoute Admirer of Nonnius, Bartas, my sacred Soueraign, and others, the miracles of our latter age, then the false sectarie(s) of these, that haue nothing at all to follow, but their own naked opinions: To conclude, I had rather with my Lord, and His most diuine Apostle sing (though I sing sorilie) the loue of heauen and earthe, then praise God (as they doe) with the woorthie quift of silence, and sitting still, or think I ~~dispraised~~ <sup>1.</sup> Him with this poetical discourse."

In answer to those who would banish poets without the city gates Fletcher recounts the benefits and uses of poetry, chief among which is its employment as a medium for the instructions of history, philosophy, and ethics. "So being-- nowe weary in perswading those that hate, I commend myself to those that love such Poets, as Plato speaks of, that sing, divine and heroical matters,

recommending theas my idle howers, not idly spent, to good schollers, and good Christians, that haue ouercome their ignorance with reason, and their reason <sup>2.</sup> with religion."

Bacon is one of the two most representative and best

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1. Ibid., p. 116.

2. Ibid., p. 118.



known critics of this period. Living between the years 1561 and 1626, he is really a character of the transition between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His critical theory in part continues some of the conceptions of the Elizabethan age, and in part anticipates those of the metaphysical school of the seventeenth century. He is a disciple of Sidney in that he develops the theory of the imaginative element in poetry, though he would give to it historic and scientific relation. He assigns to literary history a place with natural, civil, and ecclesiastical history. Its method is scientific, seeking to know the origins, traditions, occasions, and all influences concerned with literary invention; its purpose it to show the relation between literary creation and the civil and religious life in which it has been produced.

In his classification of knowledge, he refers history to the memory, poesy to the imagination, and philosophy to the reason. "Divine learning receiveth the same distribution; for the spirit of man is the same, though the revelation of oracle and sense be diverse. So as theology consisteth also of history of the church; of parables, which is divine poesy,  
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and of holy doctrine and precept."

In further discussion he defines poesy as "a part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained,

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1. Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Learning, Oxford, 1900, Book II, 85, or I, 1.



but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being not tied to laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed,  
1. and sever that which nature joined." History does not satisfy the mind of man, so it is proper that poetry should feign acts and events of greater magnitude and heroism. It portrays the rewards of virtue and vice more equitably and more in accordance with Providence. It presents life in its variations and in a pleasing way. "So it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind into the nature of things, And we see that by these insinuations and congruities with man's nature and pleasure, joined also with the agreement and consort it hath with music, it hath had access and estimation in rude times and barbarous regions, where other  
2. learning stood excluded."

He divides poetry into the narrative, the representative, and the allusive. Narrative poetry is but an imitation of history with such subjects as ward, love, the state, pleas-

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1. Ibid., IV, 1.
2. Ibid., IV, 4.



ure, or worth; representative portrays actions in a vivid manner and as if they were present; the allusive or parabolical is narrative poetry used for the accomplishment of some special purpose. This last kind was used much among the ancients to give a dignity and variety to the statement of a point. Another use of parabolical poetry is to "demonstrate and illustrate that which is taught or delivered" and which would perhaps otherwise remain obscure or misunderstood. This is used in divine poesy when the secrets and meanings of religion are involved in parables.

In contrast with the critics of the sixteenth century, he gave his influence against the allegorical interpretation of poetry. He did not say that all fables were without significance, but he believed that more often the fable was devised first and then an interpretation added, rather than that the moral was first decided upon, and the fable then written. "Surely of those poets which are now extant, even Homer himself (notwithstanding he was made a kind of scripture by the later schools of the Grecians), yet I should without any difficulty pronounce that his fables had no such inwardness in his own meaning."

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1. Ibid., IV, 4.
2. Ibid., IV, 4.



The greatest critic of the period was Ben Jonson, and with him was the beginning of real literary criticism in England. Bacon's criticisms are important, but he does not touch upon the subject of poetical literature very often; and when he does, he hastens on quickly to the discussion of something else. It is strange that while almost everyone else was being guided by romantic tendencies, Jonson should sturdily and vehemently contend for classical principles in literature. He was a disciple of Sidney, and familiar also with Italian and French criticism. His Discoveries are based upon the criticisms of Dutch scholars whose works had been published earlier in the century. In modeling upon Dutch criticism he was really following early Italian classic ideas. The Dutch had learned these from the Italians and were practicing the rules while the Italians were becoming engrossed with metaphysical problems. It was through Jonson that the Italian and classic influence was strengthened against the new rising Puritan and French tendencies in English literary criticism. Though Jonson held a great influence in his century, yet as a critic he added nothing new to criticism, no idea or system which was not already known. He was not original, but constantly sought to know the critical work of others and to make use of such material in his own criticisms. He drew largely from the Latin writers, Cicero, Quintillian, Seneca, Pliny, and ~~Per~~ptonius.

Jonson's conception of the art of poesy is very high



and noble. He calls it "the Queene of Arts, which had her Originall from heaven, received thence from the "Ebrewes, and had in prime estimation with the Greeks, transmitted to the Latines and all Nations that profess'd Civility."<sup>1.</sup> It includ-  
es the best that is in philosophy, divinity, and politics. By it men are induced to love virtue and to forsake vice. Jon-  
son believes also that mere knowledge of technique is not suf-  
ficient to make a good poet; there must be an understanding of vice and virtue and an ability to make the one distasteful and the other pleasing. To be competent to do this properly, the poet must be a good man. To quote Jonson: "If men will impartially, and not a-squint, looke toward the offices and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good Man. He that is sayd to be able to informe yong-  
men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great vertues, keepe old men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to childhood, recover them to their first strength; that comes forth the Interpreter and Arbiter of Nature, a Teacher of things divine no lesse than humane, a Master in manners; and can alone, or with a few, effect the business of Man-kind."<sup>2.</sup>

Yet he considers that the poets of his own time are

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1. Ibid., III, 419.

2. Dedication to Volpone, Ibid., I, p. 133.



much different from the ancients. He regrets that it is impossible for him to refute a great part of the accusation that "not only their manners, but their natures, are inverted, and nothing remaining with them of the dignity of Poet, but the abused name, which every Scribe usurps; that now especially in Dramatick, or (as they term it) Stage-Poetry, nothing but Ribaldry, Profanation, Blasphemy, al License of offence to God,  
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and Man is practiced." All poets, however, are not of this kind and "for my own particular," he continues, "I can, and from a most clear conscience, affirme, that I have ever trembled to thinke toward the least Prophanenesse; have loathed the use of such foule and un-washe Bandr'y, as is now made the  
2.  
foode of the Scene." In some plays he affirms that there is immorality which would be shocking to a Pagan and "blasphemy to turn the blood of a Christian to water."

Other writers have had the same opinion as Jonson concerning the office of the poet, but perhaps no one has expressed it so beautifully as he:

"I can refell opinion, and approve  
The state of poesy, such as it is,  
Blessed, eternal, and most true divine:  
Indeed, if you will look on poesy,  
As she appears in many, poor and lame,  
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1. Ibid., I, 334.

2. Ibid., I, 334.



Patched up in remnants and old worn-out rags,  
Half-starved for want of her peculiar food,  
Sacred invention; then I must confirm  
Both your conceit and censure of her merit:  
But view her in her glorious ornaments,  
Attired in the majesty of art,  
Set high in spirit with the precious taste  
Of sweet philosophy; and, which is most,  
Crowned with the rich traditions of a soul,  
That hates to have her dignity prophaned  
With any relish of an earthly thought  
Oh then how proud a presence doth she bear!  
Then is she like herself, fit to be seen  
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Of none but grave and consecrated eyes."

Our next critic of importance is George Chapman, also a poet, a play writer, and a translator, whose most important work, one of the greatest literary accomplishments of the age was his translation of Homer. It is in his preface to this work that we find a contribution to literary criticism which again illustrates the religious tendency of the period. He maintains that of all authors Homer is the first and the best, he who imitated no one, and whom no one is able to really imitate.

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1. Works, I, 59, n.



The consideration of Homer leads him to the statement of his ideas of the office of the poet and the divine nature of poesy. No other artist, Chapman believes, embodies in his work so much wisdom, learning and truth as the poet; and to him the study of poesy is harmless, pious, and of divine infusion. "To all sciences, therefore," he says, "I must still, with our learned Spondanus, preferre it, as having a perpetuall commerce with the divine Maiesty, embracing and illustrating al his most holy precepts, and enjoying continuall discourse with his thrice perfect and most comfortable spirit."<sup>1.</sup>

As Plato preferred the divinely contemplative life to the active, so Chapman prefers divine poesy to all worldly wisdom. Let those who will proclaim against it, but he shall continue to recognize it as divine and sacred. True, there are those who abuse poesy and misconstrue its purposes- "now she suffers under every swain!" But

"Since then tis nought but her abuse and Fate,  
That thus empaires her: what is this to her  
As shee is reall, or in naturall right?  
But since in true Religion men should erre  
As much as Poesie, should th' abuse excite  
The like contempt of her Divinitie?"<sup>2.</sup>

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1. Spingarn, Critical Essays, I, 68.

2. Ibid., p. 80.



The many talented Henry Peacham may next claim our attention. This Latin and English versifier, botanist, mathematician, musician, artist, and traveller settled in London in 1615 and adopted literature as his profession. Then attention had been called to the lack of accomplishments of the youth of England. To encourage them to become proficient in athletic exercise and in art, science and literature, Peacham wrote in 1622 the work which has made him best known as a literary man, the Compleat Gentleman, fashioning him absolute in the most necessary and commendable qualities concerning minde or bodie that may be required in a noble gentleman. Incidentally, he gives his opinions of science, art, and literature in England at that time. In his discussion of poetry<sup>1</sup>, there are many ideas which are probably borrowed from Sidney, Webbe, and Puttenham. He is important as a critic of the period, in that he restates and emphasizes, in his own manner, previous criticisms, and adding the weight of his opinion, increases the religious tendency in English criticism. He recommends to the youths the study of poetry, which, though it seemed to be fallen from the high estate in which it was formerly held, he considered it a "Divine and heavenly gift." The subjects of poesy are of both human and divine things. By its lively descriptions of God and his dealings with the people, men have been brought into closer relations with divinity. Through it the

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1. Henry Peacham, Compleat Gentleman, Oxford, 1906,



soul finds its expression in prayer, in repentance, in rejoicing, and in thanksgiving.

Peacham then touches more definitely upon the very common idea of the relation of poetry and the Scriptures, and of the important aid which poetry bears to religion, as has been acknowledged by the apostles and the Church fathers. "They teach us the true use and end thereof, which is to compose the Songs of Sion, and addresse the fruite of our inuention to his glorie, who is the author of so goodly a gift, which we abuse to our loues, light fancies, and basest affections."<sup>1</sup> The decline of the esteem in which poetry was formerly held has come, Peacham thought, through the lack of regard for virtue. His criticisms have the personal note of refined and cultured devotion.

Henry Reynolds, the friend to whom Michael Drayton addressed his epistle of Poets and Poesie, also believed in the divine inspiration of poets and tried to reconcile the gods of the ancients with the Christian religion. In 1632, Reynolds entered his book entitled Mythomystes, wherein a short Survay is taken of the nature and value of true Poesy, and depth of the Ancients above our modern Poets. In it he does not propose to discuss the forms or accidents of poetry, but intends to speak of the "Ancient Poets in generall, and of the Forms and reall Essence of true Poesy, considered merely in it owne worth and validity without extrinsick and suppeditatiue ornament at all, together with the parallel of their foyle, our

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1. Ibid., p. 80.



Moderne Poets and Poesyes." He desires to conserve the true estimation of poetry and to awaken a better understanding of it. He touches lightly upon Spanish and French literature and then returns to England to commend Sidney and Spencer. There are other writers he would commend, but too many are unworthy pretenders and not real poets. In comparison with the ancients, the modern English poets lack force and potency, "those extatick elevations, or that truly diuinus furor of theirs, which Plato speaking of sayes it is a thing so sacred as non sine maximo fauore Dei comparari queat, cannot bee attained to with-

out the wonderfull fauour of God." They do not take care to conceal their knowledge from the vulgar by secret mysteries, but case it broadly among an unappreciative people. Man has become so altogether imperfect and deficient that he cannot perform the high office of a poet. He can "hope to approach this supreme attitude and immensity....but by two meanes only: the one, by laying his burden on hom that on his Crosse bore the burthen of all our defectes, and interpositions between us and the hope of the vision of his blessed Essence face to face heerafter; and the other, by carefull searche of hōm here in this life (according to Saint Paules instruction) in his works; who telles us, those inuisible things of God are cleerely seene,

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1. J. E. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, Oxford, 1908, I, 143.

2. Ibid., p. 152.



being understood by the things that are made, or by the workes  
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of his blessed hands." This reminds one very much of a sermon, and Reynolds evidently believes that no one can be a poet until he has been converted and become a Christian, a recipient of knowledge and inspiration from God. The modern poet makes use of moral doctrine, while the ancients mingled a high divinity with the morality and natural philosophy which they teach through poetry. In showing the intense belief he had in the divine origin and nature of poetry, Reynolds, the literary critic, almost gives place to Reynolds, the enthusiastic theologian.

An interesting criticism is Sir John Suckling's Session of the Poets, in which he employs in a happy and unique way the names of contemporary poets, but merely touches upon the religious tone. Then, in a pleasant and witty manner, he introduces the poets assembled at a session. It is probably 2.  
Quarles "That makes God speak so bigge in 's Poetry." Another one Suckling speaks of as "so gone with Divinity That he had 3.  
almost forgot his Poetry." But further than this the religious note does not enter into his criticism.

Leaving for a while the consideration of the religious theorists, we shall notice the attack against the stage

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1. Ibid., p. 164.

2. Sir John Suckling, Works, London, 1910, p. 9.

3. Ibid., p. 10.



which was renewed in this period. When in 1579 Gosson published his School of Abuse there was little need to defend poetry and the drama. But after the first ten years of the seventeenth century disintegration of the drama began to be evident, and the splendour of the stage began to wane. With the passing of Fletcher, much of the life and strength of the drama departed; There were minor writers whose works were not without some claim to merit, but on the whole their themes were old and hackneyed, and they gave no new expression of life. The drama declined rapidly and its exhaustion led to all kinds of excesses. In 1624, William Prynne, a Puritan pamphleteer, began writing a book against stage plays, Histriomastix or the Players Scourge, published in 1632, in which he endeavored to prove that popular stage plays are "sinful, heathenish, lewd, ungodly spectacles, and most pernicious corruptions...and that the profession of play-poets, of stage players; together with the penning, acting and frequenting of stage playes, are unlawful, infamous and misbeseeming Christians."<sup>1.</sup>

When Prynne first came to London he saw four plays which caused his heart to loathe all such spectacles. Two young men, acquaintances of his, were in six months so fatally influenced to evil by plays that after they had made many vain attempts at reformation, were cast off by their parents and disinherited. Prynne was aroused and resolved to write against

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1. William Prynne, Histriomastix, the Players Scourge, London, 1633, p. 3.



"these common, vice-fomenting evils." His book is larger than he at first intended it to be, because he saw that the number of players, play books, play haunters, and play houses was increasing. The Red Bull and the Fortune were remodeled and enlarged; White Friars was newly built to accomodate the people. Prynne shows himself a prodigious reader by the manner in which he bases his arguments on texts of Scripture; Primitive Church and saints of God before and under the Law and Gospel; Canons, works of the Fathers and ancient Christians; heathen philosophers, historians, and poets; laws and edicts of Christian and Pagan nations; statutes, magistrates, universities, writers, and preachers of his own time. He denounces plays as "the very works, the pompes, inventions, and chief delights of the Divell, which all Christians solemnly abjure in their baptisme; the most pestilent corruptions of all mens (especially young mens) minds & manners; the chief fomenters of all vice and wickednesse; the greatest enemies of all vertue, grace, and goodnesse; the most mischievous plagues that can be harboured in any Church or State; yea lewd infernal pastimes not tollerable in any well-ordered Christian Republicke; not once to be haunted or applauded by any civill vertuous persons, who are either mindfull of their credits, or of their owne salvation."<sup>2.</sup> The heart of man is evil, he goes on to urge, before

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1. Ibid., Epistle Dedicatory, p. 3.

2. Epistle Dedicatory "To the Right Christian generous young gentlemen-students of the four famous nones of court,



God and that continually, so it is very hard to estrange him from which he considers his greatest joy, but which is in reality his truest misery, "the pleasures of sin which are but for a season, yet end in grief."<sup>1.</sup> This our theologians see demonstrated by the manner in which people cling to the stage plays, "the common idol and prevailing evil of our dæssolute and degenerous age: which though they had their rise from Hell; yea, their birth and pedigree from the devil himself, to whose honor service they were at first devoted: though they have been oft condemned, and quite exploded by the whole primitive Church, both under the law and gospel; by the unanimous vote of all the Fathers, and sundry councells from age to age; by modern divines and Christians of all sorts; by divers heathen states and emperors; and by whole juries of profane writers, as well historians, and poets, as philosophers: as the incendiaries and common nurseries of all villainy and wickedness; the bane and overthrow of all grace and goodness; the very poison and corruption of men's minds and manners; the very fatal plagues, and overtures of those states and kingdoms where they were once

<sup>2.</sup> tolerated." Through this long tirade he holds to one uncompromising position that all the popular stage plays, whether comedy, trajedy, or mixed, are hurtful and pernicious, not lawful for Christians to attend. However, he makes a distinction

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and especially those of Lincolne's Inne."

2. Ibid., p. 2.



between the popular plays and the Academical which are given for the sake of learning.

His reasons to show the unlawfulness of the stage he draws from the original authors of plays; the purposes for which they were first written; the style and subject matter of the plays; the character of the persons who frequent them; and the manner of action. These arguments which he treats at considerable length, he effects to be conclusive and to have a decisive effect against the theatre. Accompanied with the irrefragable and plain defects of those pretences, which give any "colourable justification to these theatrical interludes", his books, he thinks, "will give no doubt a fatal, if not a final overthrow, or catastrophe to plays and actors." Histriomastix had an enthusiastic reception and was far-reaching in its effects, serving as a model for a number of later attacks upon the stage. Several answers were written to Prynne and a great deal of sentiment was aroused against the drama. Through the influence of Histriomastix was perhaps not so great as Prynne expected or desired, yet the book was the first real occasion of a stern conflict which continued intermittently through the century and finally resulted in the great stage controversy at the end of the century, when a purification of the drama was accomplished.

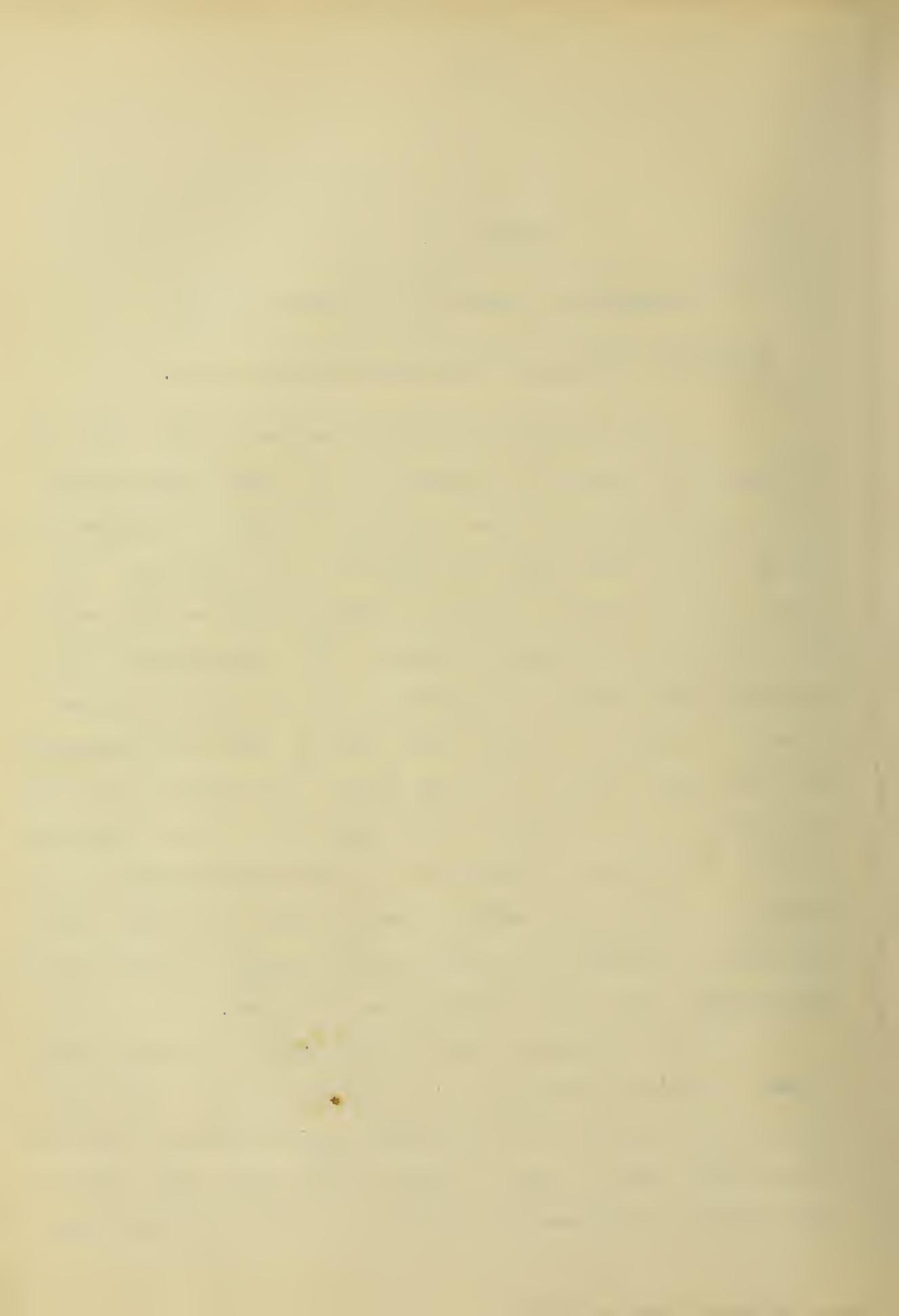


#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE COMMONWEALTH PERIOD OR THE AGE OF MILTON, EXTENDING FROM 1642 TO THE RESTORATION IN 1660.

It was during the period from 1642 to 1660 that the Puritan spirit gained the ascendancy, and the religious element became dominant in the life and literature of England. The minds of the people were concerned with two principles. The first interest was for personal righteousness, and the second was for civil and religious liberty. The Puritans desired a uniformity of religion and government in the three kingdoms. When this should be brought about and the rights of Parliament and the people insured, then men might live together as brethren and merit the presence of God among them. After all their peaceful but unavailing measures for the accomplishment of this purpose, an appeal was made to arms in 1642. With his invincible army, Cromwell was victorious everywhere, the royal power was broken, and in 1649 Charles I was beheaded.

Such conditions were not favorable to literary creation. Confusion and conflict were on every hand. Old standards of every kind were giving away, and there was no substitution of new ones to meet the loss; neither were there any fixed standards of literary criticism by which to stimulate and



regulate literary creation. There was no time for romance or the fashioning of literary ideals, but religious fervor and zeal pervaded and possessed every activity. Religion was to the Puritans all absorbing. They discountenanced every form of amusement, banished music and art from their churches, adopted a simple form of worship, used a kind of scriptural language in their conversation, and by their austere piety suppressed the expression of the emotional and aesthetic sentiments. Almost all of their literary impulses were directed to the writing of histories and treatises on religious doctrine and devotion. "The idea of the beautiful is wanting", says Taine, "and what is literature without it? The natural expression of the heart's emotion is proscribed, and what is literature without it? They abolished as impious the free stage and the rich poesy which the Renaissance had brought them. They rejected as profane the ornate style and ample eloquence which had been established around them by the imitation of antiquity and of 1. Italy."

We have seen in the previous chapter the increasing influence of the Puritan spirit. This continued in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in such an atmosphere of rigor, that the decline and disintegration of the drama was inevitable. When, in 1642, the theatres were closed, and the Puritan power became stronger, there was little incentive to

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1. H. A. Taine, History of English Literature, New York, 1872, Vol. I, Book 2, Chapter 5.



further dramatic production. The decline of lyric poetry may be attributed to the same Puritan influence. Prose was used as a means of conveying religious truth to those in need of enlightenment. Some of this prose, such as Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Holy Dying, and Richard Baxter's The Reformed Pastor and Saint's Everlasting Rest, have continued to hold permanent interest and have become religious classics.

"We need not marvel that no works of art came from these men. The unspeakable magnitude of their awakened spiritual purpose caused them instinctively, as well as deliberately, to distrust, to disdain, to condemn the distracting trivialities of earthly beauty, fading at its noblest like the flowers with which it decked its passing pageants. Like the lesser pageants and vanities,- like the courts, and the play-houses, and all the rest,- the very beauty of earthly holiness, in the formal ceremonies of whatever creed, seemed to the Puritans only obstacles embarrassing the vision which would lose itself in ecstatic contemplation of the glories which no time nor circumstance  
1. can ever change or end."

With the exception of Milton, and with the possible exception of Cowley, there were no great poets during this period. In fact, in his literary activities, Milton belongs to both the preceding and the subsequent periods as much as to

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1. Barrett Wendell, The Temper of the Seventeenth Century in English Literature, New York, 1904, pp. 228-229.



this period. During these years he was scarcely a poet at all. Already many of his best short poems had been written, and though he began in 1658 to write Paradise Lost, this and his other long poems were not published until after the Restoration. This is the period of his prose writing and the time when he exercised his greatest political influence. It is in this period also that he expressed his views of literature. Yet in the considerations of his criticisms, we shall not hesitate to use any which happen to have been written a little later and at the beginning of the next period.

The influence of foreign models was very strong in England during this period, and almost three fourths of the literature of Milton's age is imitative. Milton himself is a product of Classical, Italian, and Puritan influences, but with the power and independence of his superior genius, he did not permit himself to become entangled with any artificiality. When his first literary adventures met with acceptance, he was urged by his friends to attempt to accomplish greater things. As the idea of doing so grew upon him, he concluded that if it were possible for him to become a great author, he could adopt no greater purpose in his writing than to increase the glory of God by honoring and instructing his country; his aim was, to put it in his own words, "that what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old, did for their country, I in my proportion, with this over and above being a Christian, might doe for mine."  
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1. The Prose Works of John Milton, ed. J. A. St. John,



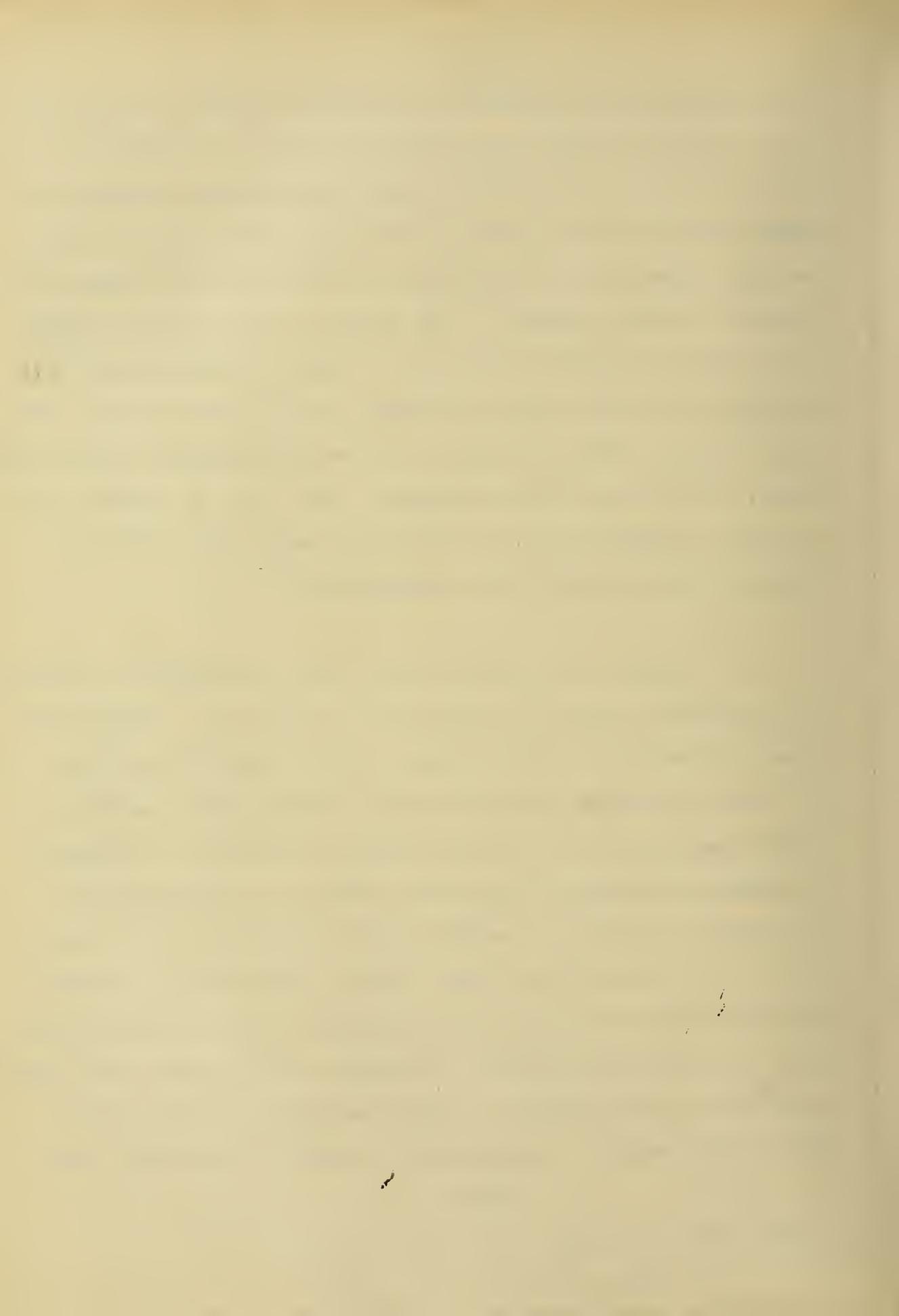
Milton appreciated the value of classical models, but believed that scriptural models were "more doctrinal and exemplary" to a Christian nation. He finds in the Bible excellent examples of almost every form of poetry; in the Songs of Solomon, a divine pastoral drama; in the apocalypse of Saint John "the image of a high and stately tragedy." The lyrics of the Bible are superior in every respect. The hymns and odes of Pindarus and Callimachus are in most respects worthy, but in others faulty: "but those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets beyond all these, not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all  
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kinds of Lyrick possey to be incomparable."

Milton, as other critics we have considered, believed in the divine inspiration and office of the poet. "These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired guift of God rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every Nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertue and publick civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune to celebrate in glorious and lofty Hymns the throne and equipage of God's Almightynesse, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his Church, to sing the victorious agonies of Martyrs and Saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious

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London, 1904, II, 478.

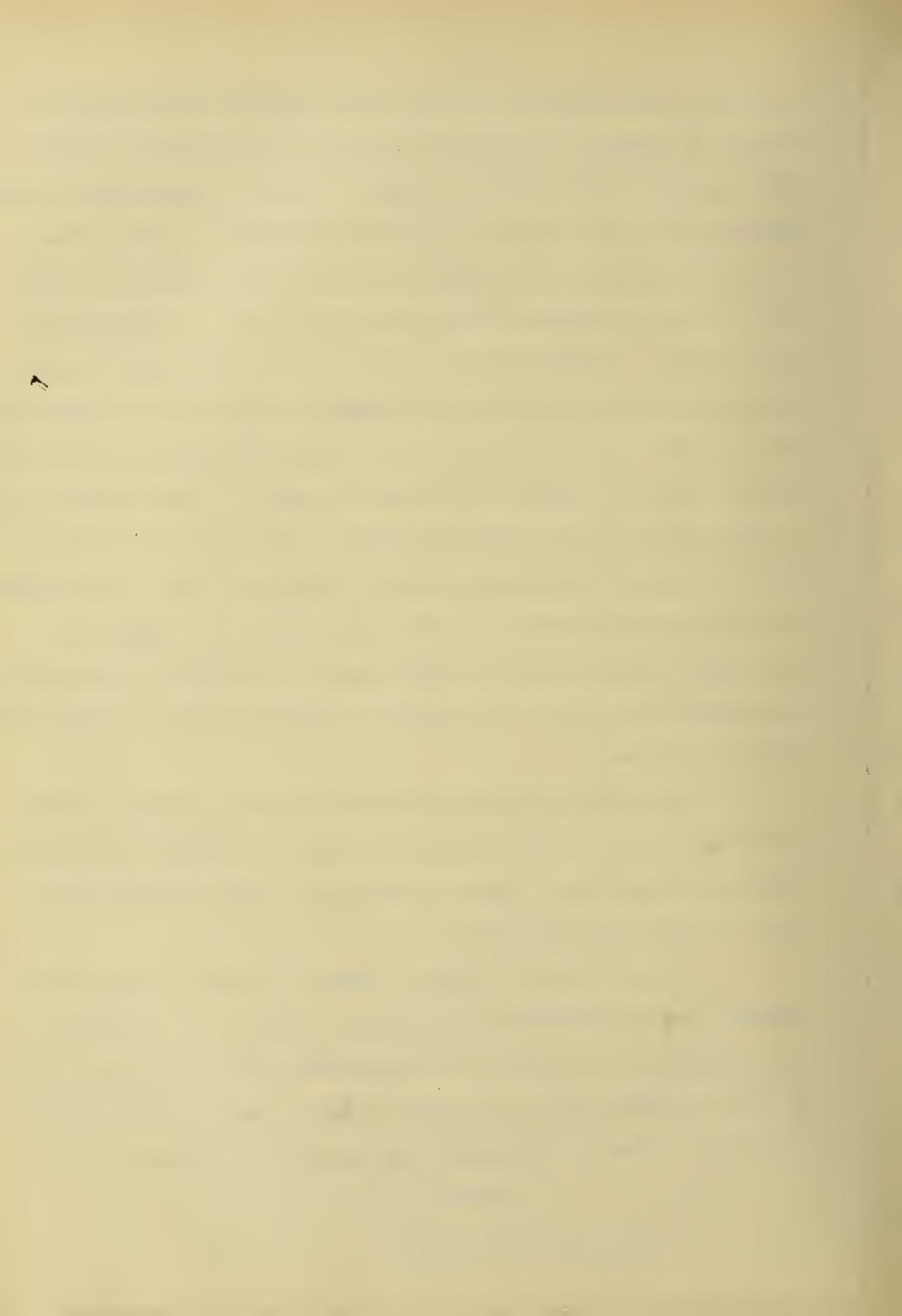
1. Ibid., II, 479.



Nations, doing valiently through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapse of Kingdoms and States from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in vertue amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion and admiration in all the changes of that which is call's fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and refluxes of Man's thoughts from within, all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe: Teaching over the whole book of sanctity and vertue, through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon Truth herselfe unlesse they see her elegantly drest, that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they would then appear both easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed.<sup>1.</sup>

In accomplishing its great didactic purpose, the observance of logic and rhetoric as taught by the rule of Plato, Aristotle, Phalereus, Cicero, Hermogenes, and Longinus may be made to assist the sublime art of poesy.

But of all the ancient forms of poetry, Milton considered tragedy the "gravest, moralest, and most profitable." Philosophers and divines of all ages made great use of it. Cicero and Plutarch often cite from tragedy, and St. Paul himself inserted a verse of Euripides into his work, 1 Cor., 15, 33.



The famous divine, Gregory of Nazianzen, together with others of his profession, not only sanctioned the study of tragedy, but themselves aspired to write this kind of poetry. Tragedy in its proper form has always been held in high esteem. But among modern poets it has been made infamous by introducing comic scenes among the sad or grave, and by bringing in trivial and vulgar persons, merely to gratify the people. Thus the purpose of divine instruction is thwarted, and tragedy brought into small esteem. As earlier critics had done, Milton lamented the state into which poetry has fallen, but feels that it again may be brought to exercise its proper function. His example has perhaps had more influence than his critical utterances in helping to accomplish this end, and in creating a strong religious tendency in literature.

Aided by his extended knowledge of literature, Milton, in a more learned and modern way expresses the same ideas as Sidney and other critics of the latter part of the sixteenth and in the early part of the seventeenth centuries had, in regard to the divine origin of poetry and the important office which the poet holds in the instruction of the people. He goes farther than they did and advocates the study of the Bible for models of the different forms of poetry in which it excels. His critical works are strengthened by his spirit of personal devotion to God and the cause of righteousness.

Although Milton had many Puritan beliefs, yet the religious tendency he shows in literature was not wholly from their influence. In his views concerning the machinery of an



epic poem he agrees with the Italian critic Minturno. Now, by the term machinery is meant the use of supernatural personages and incidents for the disentangling of the complications of the plot. It was a device of the ancient Greek dramatists, whose religion furnished them many deities and spirits for the elaborate working out of the scheme. The problem for the modern dramatist or epic poet was very different. A belief in one true and invisible God denied him the power of much spectacular effect. Minturno suggested that the Christian religion provides all the machinery necessary to the representation of heroic themes. Tasso followed the suggestion, and since Milton shows a familiarity with Tasso's works, it is probably through Tasso's influence and example that he planned his "Paradise Lost", the great Christian epic which wholly ignored epic machinery of the heathen deities, and included only such devices which properly belong to the Christian religion. The question of machinery had interested the critics all through the century, but after Milton had given his opinion which he later enforced by successful example, there arose a new interest in the discussion.

Though not the most important, yet the most abundant criticism of this period, showing strongly the religious tendency, is that of the poet and dramatist, Sir William Davenant. After the defeat of the king's army in 1641, Davenant succeeded in escaping to France. In Paris, he began to write *Gondibert*, and while there wrote to his friend Hobbes the discussion which he intended as a preface to the poem. He was arrested and brought back to England. As to the probability of his ever finishing the poem he wrote to Hobbes, before leaving France,



"Why should I trouble you or myself with these thoughts, when I am pretty certain I shall be hanged next week?" He escaped death at this time through the influence of Milton whom he had once befriended in a perilous situation. As a prisoner in the Tower, he finished and published the poem, Gondibert. It is with the preface of this poem that we are concerned, since it embodies his critical remarks on poetry, which reflect the religious tendency of the times; and since it called forth a commendatory and eulogistical reply from his friend.

In taking up the question of the machinery of a poem, ~~Dave~~ <sup>point</sup> begins by mentioning some of the criticisms made against Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and Statius. Some object that Homer carries his fable beyond Nature, and addresses his muse in a familiar way which brings him into conversation with the gods. His characters act in the same familiar way. Men and gods freely mingle together; men are raised to heavenly conditions, and gods descend to earthly conditions. Virgil so relates the earthly and the heavenly elements in its story that it loses in its instructiveness to human life. Statius also goes beyond Nature, into Heaven and Hell. In this he conflicts with the best modern dramatic critics, who believe that the drama is most profitable to manners when the scene is laid in the country of those for whose instruction the author is writing; and who "avoid those remote Regions of Heaven and Hell, as if the People, whom they make civill by an easie communication with reason (and familiar reason is that which is call'd the civility of the State), were become more discreet than to have their eyes persauded by the



descending of Gods in gay Clouds, and more manly than to be  
frightening of Ghosts in Smoke." Tasso, though influenced  
by the ancients and learning from them the use of the Council  
in Heaven, witches travelling through the air, and ghosts in-  
habiting the woods, is inexcusable. Some excuse might be made  
for this practice by the early poets and priests, "yet a Christian  
Poet whose religion little needs the aid of Invention, hath less  
occasion to imitate such Fables as meanly illustrate a prob-  
able Heaven by the fashion and dignity of Courts, and make a  
resemblance of Hell out of the Dreams of frightened Women, by  
which they continue and increase the melancholy mistakes of the  
2.  
People."

To Davenant history is much less effective in impress-  
ing principles of morality upon the people, than is epic poet-  
ry, or the drama. In Gondibert, he chose to use Christian per-  
sons as his characters, because, he thinks that religion stimu-  
lates and governs manners and virtue better than the particular  
schools of philosophy, where the motives to right conduct are  
too often mingled with secular incentives. He chose the Christ-  
ian religion because its principles conduce more to "explicable  
virtue" than any other form of religion does. He thought best  
to select characters who lived in the early days of Christian-  
ity, "perceiving 'tis with the servants of Christ as with other  
servants under temporal poer, who with all cleanness, and even

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1. The Works of Sir William Davenant, kt, London,,  
1673, p. 2.
2. Ibid., p. 3.



with officious diligence, perform their duty in their Master's sight, but still as he grows longer absent become more slothful, unclean, and false. And this whoever compares the present with the Primitive times may too palpably discern.<sup>1.</sup>"

Following the weakness, as he considers it, of other men, he has placed the scene of the action of Goudibert in Italy. The action, he has taken from no other schools of morality than courts and camps. The distempers of love and ambition are the only characteristics he means to picture as terrible, and even these he does not purpose to exemplify in low and contemptible characters.

The plan of Gondibert is different from that of the ordinary heroic poem and he fears that he shall be accused of innovation and of having disregarded the rules of the ancients. Even though some should thus accuse him, yet he would insist that "a Poet who hath wrought with his own instruments at a new design, is no more answerable for disobedience to Predecessors, than Lawmakers are liable to those old Laws which themselves have repealed."<sup>2.</sup>

His definition of wit is striking and unique. "Wit is not only the luck and labour, but also the dexterity of thought, rounding the world, like the Sun, with unimaginable motion, and bringing swiftly home to the memory universal survey. It is the Soul's Powder, which, when suppress, as for-

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1. Ibid., 4, 5,

2. Ibid., 8.



bidden from flying upward, blows up the restraint, and loseth all force in a farther ascension towards Heaven (the region of God), and yet by nature is much less able to make any inquisition downward towards Hell, the Cell of the Devill; but breaks through all about it as farr as the utmost it can reach, removes, uncovers, makes way for Light where darkness was inclos'd, till great bodies are more examinable by being scatter'd into parcels, and till all that find its strength (but most of mankind are strangers to Wit, as Indians are to Powder) worship it for the effects as deriv'd from the Deity.<sup>1.</sup> He sees it demonstrated in divines, statesmen, and leaders of armies.

After explaining the plan of Gondibert, Davenant proceeds to discuss the manner in which the author of an epic poem should write. He should wisely order and govern his ideas and strength, even at the expense of being accused of lacking inspiration which the ancient poets possessed. But these poets were also priests and statesmen to whose authority the inspiration or the similation of divine fury gave great weight. Modern poets who profess to have inspiration probably imitate the Greek rather then the Hebrew poets whose inspiration was given for the instruction, exhortation, or comfort of God's chosen people. "But", he continues, "though the ancient Poets are excus'd, as knowing the weak constitution of those deities from whom they took their Priesthood, and the frequent necessity of



dissembling for the ease of government, yet these, who also from the chief to the meanest are Statesmen and Priests, but have not the luck to be Poets, should not assume such saucy familiarity with a true God."<sup>1.</sup>

The statement of his reason for writing Godibert, leads Davenant to consider why men generally desire to become authors. There are two reasons; it is either because they are ambitious for fame or because they are instigated by conscience. Davenant confesses that he is impelled by fame, which he considers not a vain think, but "a little taste of Eternity." It was through ther songs, psalms, and anthems the Moses, David, and Solomon achieved everlasting fame." Those who write because of the command of conscience are likely to be the most voluminous, being urgent in the discharge of a duty and anxious to do all that they can for the instruction of others. This seems to him to be the reason why there is in libraries such an abundance of books on religious and moral subjects. Many of these accounts are unskillful and give incongrucus, melancholy visions of God.

But poetry has always been acceptable to God and useful among men, because they are ordained to rule through a spiritual power, and because, as the representatives of God, they are to persuade men to temper their passions and aid in the conservation of right government.<sup>1.</sup> Yet with all their advantages they have

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1. Ibid., 10.

2. Ibid., 13.



not been able to prevail and to have authoritative control over the people. They are to be censured for neglecting the assistance of the poets who "chatm the people with harmonious precepts", and whose aid "Divines should not disdain, since their Lord, the Saviour of the World, vouchsaf'd to deliver his Doctrine in Parabolicall Fictions."<sup>1.</sup>

Davenant goes on to urge that poesy is useful to leaders of armies, as well as to divines, since by it are recorded the praises of virtue and of valor. Statesmen and lawmakers also find poetry a beneficial aid in strengthening the powers of government. The heroic poem has in this respect a particular force of its own in training and preparing the mind and understanding of the people.

Davenant further believes that poesy is subservient to, and gives moral assistance to the precepts of the Christian religion by its regulation of manners. It is the best expositor of God and Nature, and its aid should not be disregarded by those who are interested in the reformation of the people. "And 'tis injurious not to think Poets the most useful Moralists, for as Poesy is adorn'd and sublim'd by Musick, which makes it more pleasant and acceptable, so Morality is sweetened and made more amiable by Poesy."<sup>2.</sup> But some teachers and divines, by their austerity and neglect of pleasing aids, have not been able to bring much improvement in the manners of men.

1. Ibid., 14.

2. Ibid., 19.



Neither Religion, nor nature, nor reason, nor authority can be argued against poesy. Plato's condemnation is only upon such poets as represent wrongly the characters of the gods and who make vice fashionable by representing it with a pleasing aspect, thus abusing religion and virtue. His interpretation of the famous passage of Plato concerning the expulsion of poets from his Commonwealth is that Plato did not desire to condemn poesy, but the poems which were popular then, for he said; "If any Man, having ability to imitate what he pleases, imitate in his Poems both good and evil, let him be reverenc'd as a sacred, admirable, and pleasant Person."<sup>1</sup> Again, "Let us make use of more profitable, though more severe and less pleasant Poets, who can imitate that which is for the honor and benefit of the Commonwealth."<sup>2</sup>.

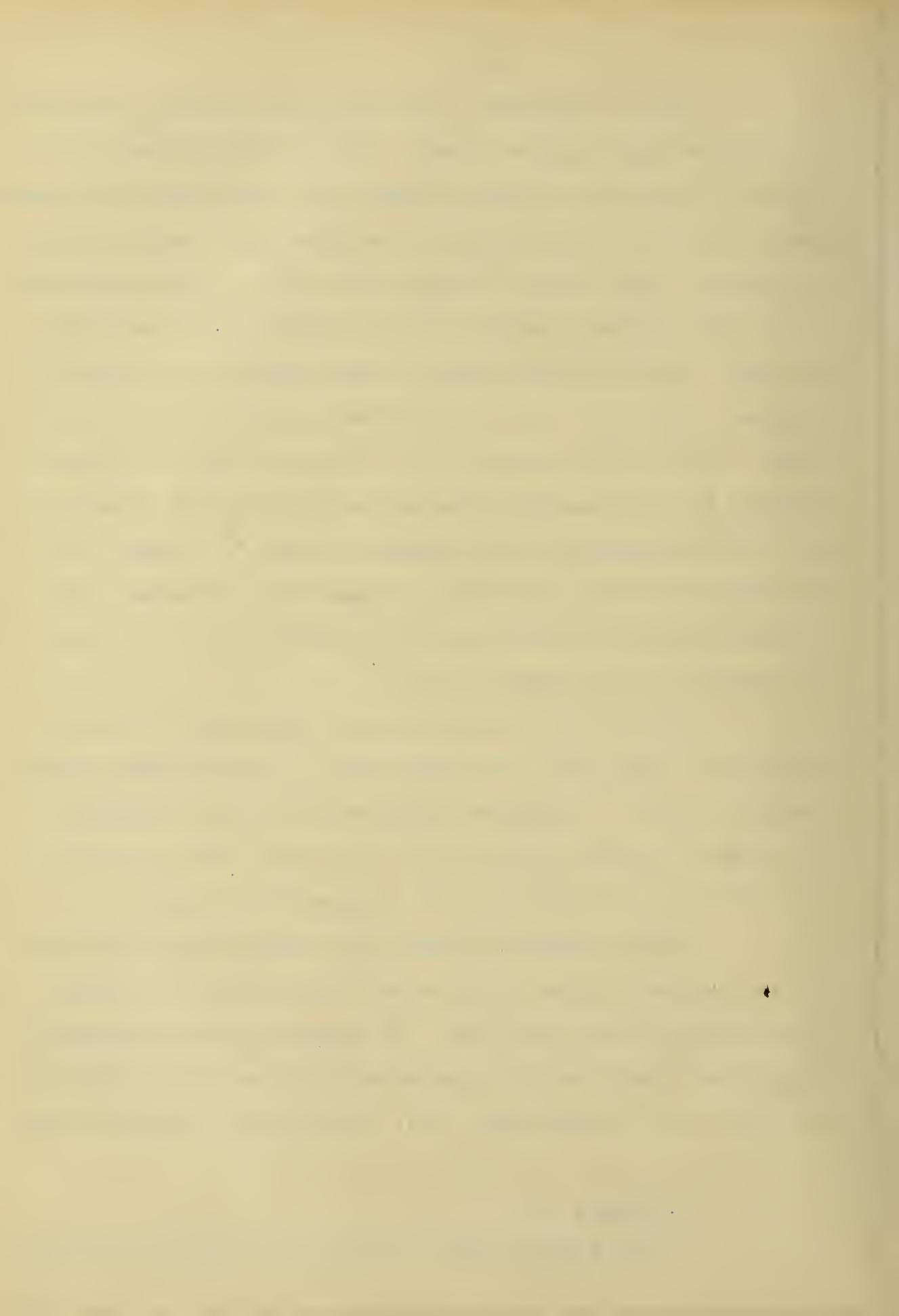
This preface Davenant dated from Louvre in Paris, January 2, 1650, and in the same year his friend Thomas Hobbes replied to it. Though he considers himself an incompetent and corrupt witness in this particular case, yet he desires to say something of the nature and differences of poesy.

Hobbes commends Davenant and discusses the attitude of the ancients toward style, verse, and choice of subject, particularly in the epic poem. He comments on the invocation of a muse or some deity, which he says is the common practice of almost all the approved poets. He would not praise nor con-

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1. Ibid., 20.

2. The Answer of Mr. Hobbes to Sr. William D'Avenant's



demn the practice among heathen poets, since they were divines among the people and had a spiritual authority whose influence the invocation increased. Our own divines often call unseasonably for some particular spirit to aid them. "When they call... for Zeal there appears a Spirit of Cruelty;...instead of Truth they raise Discord; instead of Wisdom, Fraud; instead of Reformation, Tumult; and Controversie instead of Religion."<sup>1.</sup> The heathen poets are consistent in their invocations, and never cause confusion in the commonwealth as our divines in their religious controversies. "But why a Christian should think it an ornament to his Poem, either to profane the true God or invoke a false one, I can imagine no cause but a reasonless imitation of Custom, of a foolish custom, by which a man, enabled to speak wisely from the principles of nature and his own meditation, loves rather to be thought to speak by inspiration,<sup>2.</sup> like a Bagpipe."<sup>3.</sup>

The next critic of consideration is Abraham Cowley, who during his reading of the Faerie Queen learned to love poetry. Before reaching his twelfth year he had read all of Spenser's works, and at fifteen published Poetical Blossoms, a collection of five poems. After attending school at Westminster, he entered Trinity College in 1637. There he continued to write poetry. During the period between Jonson and Dryden, Cowley was the poet who held undisputed authority. Even the

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Preface Before Gondibert, London, 1650, Ibid., 21-27.

1. Ibid., 23.

2. Ibid., 23.

3. Complete Works of Abraham Cowley, ed. by A. B.



great Milton was forced to take a secondary place in the popular estimation during the lifetime of Cowley. Yet Cowley's fame was not of long continuance. In the eighteenth century it began to wane, and his poetry was coldly received. Although the model of cultured poetry in his own time, by 1738 Pope writes--

"Who now reads Cowley? if he pleases yet,  
His moral pleases, not his pointed wit;  
Forgot his Epic, nay, Pindaric art,  
But still I love the language of his heart."

Dryden, however, was an admirer of him and says, "his authority is almost sacred to me."<sup>1.</sup> In 1656, he published a volume containing his most important poems, among which are The Mistress, Pindarique Odes, and Davideis. As a poet he created an atmosphere of moral purity. In his preface he states that although in some of his poems he has treated of love, yet he has endeavored to avoid the unpardonable vices of obscenity and profaneness.

He plans to write his Davideis in twelve books, modeling it upon Virgil. It is to be a heroical poem telling of the troubles of David and closing with "that most poetical and excellent Elegie of Davids upon the death of Saul and Jonathan." The whole design would include many arguments which he has neither leisure nor desire to present, even as the dignity of the

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Grosart, Edinburg, 1881.

1. Essay on Heroic Plays, 1672.



matter deserves. He thinks that no worthier subject for an heroic poem could be chosen than the story of David, who after many wonderful adventures became the greatest earthly monarch. Not only was he renowned throughout the world, but was peculiarly honored by God, in that through his race Christ himself descended. The subject is particularly suited to a Christian poet, whose delight is to honor the greatest of all princes and the man after God's own heart. Enraptured with his theme he continues, to speak of the many admirable subjects which the Holy Scripture offers to poesy, by the treating which the people may be benefited and pleased, and at the same time the glory of God increased.

But he laments the abuse to which this "Divine science" of poesy has been subjected. Growing incensed at the thought of it, he declares that "Amongst all holy and consecrated things which the Devil ever stole and alienated from the service of the Deity, as Altars, Temples, Sacrifices, Prayers, and the like, there is none that he so universally and so long usurpt as Poetry.<sup>1.</sup> It is time to snatch it away and baptize it anew to the cause of righteousness. When this has been accomplished and the Jews have been converted, then the kingdom of God will surely come.

He believes that lying is not essential to good poetry, though it is used with some fables. The ridiculous stories of gods and heroes might do for the ancients, since they had no



other theology. This was perhaps better than no religion at all, but we have now no need of such fables. How much more admirable than the subjects of antiquity are the tales in the Word of God; where all the books are either exalted poetry or give abundant materials for it. None but an artist can know how to convert this material into real poetry.

Most interesting is his criticism in this connection. "For if any man design to compose a Sacred Poem by onely turning a story of the Scripture, like Mr. Quarles's or some other godly matter, like Mr. Heywood of Angels, into Rhyme, He is so far from elevating of Poesie that he onely abuses Divinity."<sup>1.</sup> However, he is assured that any one "who can write a Prophane Poem well may write a Divine one better." From this we may assume that he held Quarles and perhaps the other metaphysical poets in no very high estimation.

In looking over the criticisms of the period, we are surprised that there is no revival of the stage controversy. Perhaps this was due in part to the fact that the drama had declined so much since the great outburst of the Elizabethan Age. that its defense could be but a feeble one. Then again, Puritan rule arbitrarily settled the matter and defense would not be availing to its restoration. Since the government had decided the question by enactment, even though some might have desired to attack it in a literary way, yet it would have been a purposeless task.

Though the theatres were closed in 1642, the love for plays remained deeply rooted in the minds of many of the



people. Before the play houses had been long closed, a petition was made by actors for their reopening. In reply to the insistence of the people, Parliament passed an act in February 1647 ordering that all stages and galleries, seats and boxes should be destroyed, that all actors of pieces who were recognized as culpable, should be publicly whipped, and that all spectators should be condemned to pay a fine of five shillings for each offence. But the taste for the theatre remained, and plays were acted secretly.<sup>1.</sup> Under Cromwell some representations were given three or four miles away from the city of London. But the drama began to change and to be able to seduce and charm even the Puritans. Puppet shows, marionettes, representations of subjects from the Old and New Testaments became popular. As to the story of Ninevah, with Jonah and the whale, the Puritans could silence their horror for the profaneness of the stage and theatrical pieces, and frequently they came to these sacred (?) representations.

Cromwell professed a fierce hatred for plays, but was a patron of literary men. He had a taste for letters and an appreciation of literary merit. He also had some delight in music. Davenant remembered these things, and in 1656, he asked Cromwell to allow the presentation of a piece which should be given with the aid of declamation and music, according to the

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1. It seems strange he should condemn Quarles and Heywood and pass Crashaw and Herbert unnoticed.

1. One of these was The Cruel Brother, written by Davenant in 1630.



manner of the ancients. No protest was made and the way was open for future spectacles, though they must be advanced with prudence. In the same year Davanant's Siege of Rhodes was given, and in 1658, the Cruelties of the Spaniards in Peru" appeared on the stage. Cromwell liked this later play because he detested Spain. After his death and the accession of Richard, the bars were let down, and the drama regained its freedom. With the Restoration and the favour of royalty its revival in the next period was an easy accomplishment. In the atmosphere of court luxury and licentiousness, its tone became quite different from that in the Elizabethan times. Then too, it gave new opportunity for criticism.

1. Louis Charlanne, L'Influence Francaise en Angleterre au XVII Siecle, Paris, 1906, p. 242.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE RESTORATION PERIOD, OR THE AGE OF DRYDEN,

EXTENDING FROM 1660 to 1700.

The period beginning with the Restoration and extending through the rest of this century and into the first part of the next has been designated by some students of the history of English literature as the First Critical Period. It is not our purpose to follow literary criticism through this whole period, for this would include extensive notice of Swift, Addison, Steele, and Pope; we desire only to trace the religious tendency in criticism down to the end of the century, when in the ~~controversy~~ concerning the "misbehaviour of the stage with respect to morality and religion", the religious ideas of the century in regard to literature had their most copious expression in criticism. After this outburst of Puritanism, poetry and the stage were left to pursue their own courses so far as the removal of all decided religious restraint permitted.

Usually an age of criticism follows upon one of literary creation, though sometimes criticism may be contemporary with creation. A literature of judgments follows or accompanies one of knowledge and execution. In this period now under discussion, criticism is both subsequent to and contemporary with



creative activity. There was an abundance of material for the critic. The Elizabethan age with an unusual wealth, variety, and splendour of literature, was followed by the period of the Puritan influence when, though it did not flourish in such a-bundance and variety as previously, it received new and import-ant impulses. The religious tone was everywhere prominent in literature, and the great Milton raised a high standard of the true worth and dignity of poetry. There had been some cessa-tion of literary activity, and after the disturbance and chang-ing of standards in literature as well as in political life after the Restoration, it was but natural that some of the more serious minded should turn to the observation and comparison of earlier and of contemporary literature.

The period began with a violent reaction from the Puritanism of the previous years. In its extreme earnestness, Puritanism had degenerated into a sort of asceticism and cant. Failing to see the beauties in the world and the magnitude and excellence of God's love, the Puritans lived continually in a sort of gloom, sacrificing all the joys and pleasures of life in order to propitiate the divine wrath which they believed was continually overshadowing them. Men of little nobility of soul had pushed Puritanism to its disagreeable extremes, so that it became, to a large extent, a kind of fanaticism which was depressing to the nation. With the Restoration, the sys-tem broke down, and the lower and earthly side of human nature began to assert itself with a vengeance. Society became im-moral and debauched; virtue was ridiculed because it seemed to savour of Puritanism; duty, integrity, patriotism, and honor



were held in little esteem. England had been stifled under the rigor and severity of Puritan rule, and with the return of Charles II was eager to enjoy what it had been deprived of for so long. The common people who held Puritan convictions were brutally set aside, and the dissoluteness and crime, which found their centre and precedent in court life, spread throughout the nation. Religion was no longer a question; to be impious was considered good taste, and atheism was fashionable. Pleasures of the worst kind prevailed, and in all the theatres there was not a single priest who <sup>was not</sup> <sub>1.</sub> ridiculed.

During the Puritan or Commonwealth period the theatre was closed, and taste and leisure were wanting for much writing other than polemical. At the Restoration every one tried literature, attempting to write upon such superficial themes as the times presented. Poetry and romance were gallant sensual, satirical and obscene. Perhaps at no time in the history of English literature was the moral tone so low. Though there were a few writers such as Rochester, Etherege, and Buckingham who had some talent, most of the authors in the early part of this period were inferior men who saw in literature merely a diversion. Cowley was much neglected; Butler was similarly treated; Bunyan and Milton wrote amid depressing circumstances: their works were out of tune with the times.

Plays had had a deep influence in England from the time of the Renaissance, and even during the Commonwealth some had been given stealthily. The appetite for them was maintained, and at the Restoration the theatres really opened of

1. Samuel Pepys, Diary, London, 1904. Entry Dec. 25, 1662.



themselves. Their organization was one of the affairs of state in which Charles II first interested himself, and Dryden says that

"The poets who must live by courts, or starve,  
Were proud so good a government to serve;  
And, mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,  
Tainted the stage for some small snip of gain."

The fever of pleasure made attendance on plays a most fashionable diversion. Trajedy was not amusing, so comedy was the most popular kind of play. The rise of the so called heroic pieces encouraged a kind of heroic madness or fury. Men, who exulted in their own strength and defied man, gods, heaven, and good sense were on the stage presented as noble. The utter profligacy of imagination pervertedly sought the base and ignoble, and comedy ministered to the perverted tastes of the time. The writers of comedy have become mere remembrances, and Dryden has remained glorious because he wrote something other than comedy. Though the people of the court attended and patronized the theatre, the city people remained to a large extent influenced by Puritan ideals, and were shocked at the morals of the plays presented. The most serious and estimable people deserted and condemned the theatre. The courtiers and those influenced by royalty were so enamoured of the theatre that they even opposed closing it during the plague; while the victims were still dying, they desired the Bishops to thank Heaven for the end of the scourge,--this in order that the play houses might be reopened.

There was another reason why the dramatists of this



period could attain no lasting fame. Authors must produce without any relaxation. Generally a play was presented only three or four times, the exception being a month's presentation. This necessitated quick work and an ability to please a fanciful taste. Naturally there was a great amount of elaboration, collaboration, and adaptation.

Notwithstanding the pernicious influence of the French upon English society and morals, and on literature in its close relation to them, there were more salutary influences than these social ones. The influence upon English criticism was particularly advantageous. Boileau, Bossu, and Rapin were very much admired in England. Dryden, whom Jonson calls the father of English criticism, was strongly influenced by Boileau. At the very time when criticism was beginning to be an art, France furnished models of elegance and good taste. This French influence did not disfigure the national genius and originality, or lead English literature captive; it only added the valuable qualities of limpidity, clearness, concision, correctness, order, and good taste, giving a didactive value and expansion which made English criticism European in a greater sense than it had been before.

Among the individual critics we shall notice in this period, as exhibiting the religious tendency, the first is Richard Flecknoe, a Roman Catholic priest, a writer of some note, and the hero of Dryden's later satire, Mac Flecknoe. He disapproved of the conditions of the modern stage and was therefore not very popular among contemporary writers. After he had



published several religious pieces, he wrote in 1654, Love's Dominion, a dramatick piece full of excellent Moralities, written as a pattern for the reformed stage. In this he aimed to furnish a model for the proper kind of plays. A little later there appeared his Short Discourse of the English Stage, which contained further anti-stage views.

In the Discourse he criticises plays in general of the relation which they bear to religion. Among the Greeks and Romans plays were almost wholly abolished when those kingdoms were converted to Christianity. Almost all of the theatres and temples were destroyed, since they appeared to be relics of barbarism, only a few being reserved for the service of the true God. No plays were given in these theatres except those which had Scriptural subjects. Even in England during the Elizabethan Age, plays and actors were banished to the suburbs. "In which time Playes were so little incompatible with Religion, and the Theatre with the Churc[h], as on Week-days after Vespers both the Children of the Chappel and St. Paules Acted Playes....till people growing more precise, and Playes more licentious, the Theatre of Pauls was quite supprest, and that of the Children of the Chappel converted to the use of the Children of the l. Revels." Yet the stage should be "a harmless and innocent recreation", whose "chiefest end is to render Folly ridiculous, Vice odious, and Virtue and Noblenesse so amiable and lovely,

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as every one shu'd be delighted and enamoured with it; from which when it deflects, as corruptio optimi pessima, of the best it becomes the worst of Recreations.<sup>1.</sup>

Contemporaneous with Flecknoe was Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster, who held distinction as a man of letters as well as a divine and politician. He was a friend and imitator of Cowley, and in his will Cowley desired him to revise and collect his works for the press, impressing upon him the obligation that he should "be sure to let nothing pass that might seem the least offence to Religion or good Manners." It is only incidentally in his Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley that he adds anything to the religious temper of criticism of his day. Sprat admires Cowley for his manner of dealing with men, Nature, and Providence, and thinks it "most remarkable, that a man who was so constant and fix'd in the Moral Ideas of his mind should yet be so changeable in his Intellectual, and in both to the Highest degree of Excellence."<sup>2.</sup> His wit is greatest in his moral and divine works. Sprat goes on to notice that some object to his use of Scriptural allusions and similitudes, but since they themselves often use Biblical phrases and quotations to strengthen their extravagant ideas, "why then might not he take the liberty to fetch from thence some ornament for the innocent Passions, and natural Truths, and moral Vertues which he describes?"<sup>3.</sup>

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1. Ibid., II, 96.

2. Ibid., II, 130.

3. Ibid., II, 134.



He did not in this way debase divinity, but only made it familiar to the hearts of the people. He abhorred the use of Scripture in raillery, a profaneness which violates the foundations of <sup>an</sup> society and which is <sup>an</sup> extreme rudeness of manners.

Thomas Rymer was a more important student of dramatic literature who believed that the neglect of observance of the classical rules of unity had a seriously injurious effect upon the English drama. To support his views, he published in 1674, an English translation of R. Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie. In the preface to this work he criticises Davenant severely as an epic poet. One cannot find any heroic action, and though his religion would not allow him to dispense with an invocation, he might have shown his design in some kind of a proposition. He does not heighten his action by making heaven and hell interested. <sup>1</sup> Cowley, he believes, was more happy in heroic poetry, for he understood the technique better and was more familiar with Homer and Virgil. Rymer disagrees with Cowley as to his choice of subject. Poetry has no life or operation without probability. Many of the events of sacred history are not consistent with the common principles of morality, but belong only to a certain dispensation. Instead of having, in Daveideis, one great and perfect action, Cowley introduces several actions, and this necessitates too much digression for an epic poem. Even the event of David's becoming



king, Rymer thinks, is lacking in heroic action, for it was a result of no exertion on his part. This fact together with the necessity of degression makes David himself of too little importance to be the subject of an epic poem.<sup>1.</sup>

Passing on to the discussion of tragedy, Rymer observes that it was originally with the ancients a part of religious worship, when the priest constituting a chorus performed all the ceremony. The episode was added as an innovation, although the priests protested strongly against it. Gradually the episode grew to such proportions that it entirely supplanted the chorus and became itself known as the tragedy. Then more actors were introduced and a variety of scenes. Later, when Socrates and other Greeks began to weary of mechanical philosophy and to take a more lively interest in morality and virtue, the drama became a natural conveyance for instruction. Chief among the first of this kind of dramatists were Sophocles and Euripides. "Finding in History, the same end happen to the righteous and to the unjust, virtue often opprest, and wickedness on the Throne, they saw these particular yesterday-truths were imperfect and improper to illustrate the universal and eternal truths by them intended. Finding also that this unequal distribution of rewards and punishments die perplex the wisest, and by the Atheist was made a scandal to the Divine Providence, They concluded that a Poet must of necessity see justice exactly administered, if he

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1. Ibid., p. 172.



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intended to please." Besides purging the passions, poetry must be profitable in causing one to observe "that constant order, that harmony and beauty of Providence, that necessary relation and chain, whereby the causes and the effects, the virtues and rewards, the vices and the punishments are proportion'd and link'd together, how deep and dark soever are laid the Springs 2. and however intricate and involv'd are their operations."

Rymer examines among other plays Shakespeare's Othello. He denies Shakespeare any excellence in tragedy; Othello was to him merely "a bloody farce without salt or savour", and having but "a phantom of a fable."

In all probability, the great master, Milton, had some influence upon the work of his nephew, Edward Phillips, who in choosing his shpere of work "pitcht upon one Faculty first, which, not more by chance than inclination, falls out to be that of the Poets, a Science certainly of all others the most noble and exalted, and not unworthily termed Divine, since the heighth of Poetical rapture hath ever, been accounted little 3. less than Divine Inspiration." Ancient poets, Phillips says, are to be held in veneration, for it is from them that we have

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1. Tragedies of the Last age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients and by the Common Sense of All Ages, Spingarn II, 188.

2. Ibid., pp. 206-207.

3. Spingarn II, 259



received the precepts and examples for the perfection of our poetry.

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Sheffield, Roscommon, and Wolsey also advocated the divine nature and inspiration of poetry. Wolsey is noticeable for his objection to satire on the ground that it is contrary to the very first elements of morality. It does incalculable mischief by calling good evil and evil good; by it good and deserving men are often censured while unworthy ones are praised; traitors and time servers are honored, while noble patriots are made to appear ridiculous.

Sir William Temple, was one of the earliest important critics of the Restoration Period who were interested in the religious tendencies in literature. He thought, however, that many persons of most excellent and penetrating literary genius had been overwhelmed among the disputes and controversies concerning religion. As he has observed, the majority of men

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1. John Sheffield, Works, An Essay upon Poetry, London, 1729
2. Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, An Essay on Translated Verse, Spingarn, II, 297-309.
3. Robert Wolsey, Preface to Valentinian, a Tragedy, as Tis Lately Alter'd by the Late Earl of Rochester, Ibid., III, 1-31
4. On Ancient and Modern Learning, Spingarn III, 67.



are divided into two classes according as they devote their thoughts to pleasure or to profit. Usually profit and pleasure are considered as two different things, and the men devoted to profit are considered busy persons, while those seeking pleasure are thought to be idle. Poets are happily able to appeal to both classes and at the same time both to please and to instruct. This excellent combination of the two elements gives occasion for poetry being considered divine. The Greek and Latin names given to poets express this idea; the Greek word designating a maker or creator of things out of nothing, the Latin word being the same as that used for prophet.

Yet, although Sir William admires poetry, he is not inclined to adore it. Its execution demands the greatest excellency of genius, but nothing which reaches beyond the human. It can be no more divine in its effects than in its causes, and is not any more to be wondered at and reverenced than music or natural magic which is incomprehensible to uninformed minds.<sup>1.</sup> The subjects of poetry seem to Temple to be generally praise, instruction, love, grief, or reproach. Dramatic poetry has embraced all of these subjects, but "the chief end seems to have been Instruction, and under the disguise of Fables or the Pleasure of Story to shew the Beauties and Rewards of Virtue, the Deformities and Misfortunes or Punishment of Vice; By Examples of both, to Encourage one, and Deter Men from the other; to Reform

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1. Of Poetry, Ibid., p. 75.



ill Customs, Correct ill Manners, and Moderate all violent  
1. Passions" Thus the Gentile religion was very agreeably woven  
into the poetry of the ancients. Following their example the  
modern poets tried to give Christianity a place in their work,  
"but the true Religion was not found to become Fiction so well as  
a false had done, and all their attempts of this kind seemed  
2. rather to debase Religion than to heighten Poetry." As an  
illustration of this point Temple refers to Spenser who tried to  
supply his poem with morality and instruction. Although it was  
well written, the design was poor and his moral was so evident  
as to lose its effect.

Aside from faults of technique, one of the greatest  
corrupting tendencies of modern poetry, Temple maintained, was  
that of ridicule. Rabelais, the French author seems to be the  
father of satirical poetry, and his influence has been decidedly  
pernicious; for his writings there is so much of malice, smuttiness,  
3. and profanity that a prudent, modest, or pious per-  
son would not dare to follow him.

Gerald Langbaine gives a new turn to the religious  
tendency in criticism. He criticises Dryden because of his  
attacks upon almost all religious denominations; "As if, by being  
Laureate, he were as Infallible as St. Peter's Successor, and  
had as large a Despotick Power as Pope Stephanus the Sixth to damn  
his Predecessors, he has assaulted with all the Bitterneses im-  
aginable not only the Church of England but also ridicul'd the

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1. Idem, ibid., p. 90.
2. Idem, ibid., p. 99.
3. Idem, ibid., p. 101.



feveral Profeffions of the Lutherans, Calvanifts, Socinians, Presbyterians, Hugonots, Anabaptifts, Independents, Quakers, & tho' I must obferve by the way, that fome people among the Perfwaſious here mention'd might juſtly have expected better <sup>1</sup> uſage from him"

As a champion of the religious element in literature, John Dennis stands quite prominent. He follows Rymer in a belief in the theory of poetic justice, but does not agree with Rymer in his view of the proper manner of altering the English stage. The suggested plan would ruin instead of reform it. The Grecian method could not be maintained in England without a restoration of Grecian religion, customs and climate. Because therefore, the Chorus does not have such proper environment, <sup>2.</sup> it should be banished from the English stage. Dacier, the French critic, insisted that a chorus is necessary to give moral teaching and to reflect on the vicious or commendable traits of the actors in the piece; if the Chorus is removed, morality will also be taken away, for it would be impossible for the characters to become to any extent didactive and reflective upon the action. Yet, Dennis contends that our English without the Chorus teaches virtue by restraining violent and irregular passions. Again, it teaches morality by the fable or story. Thought actors sometimes speak profanely and impiously, the audience is always assured of his punishment for the impiety. <sup>3.</sup>

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1. Geralo Langbaine, An Account of Enlgish Dramatick Poets, Oxford, 1691, pp. 139, 140.

2. John Dennis, The Impartial Critick, ibid., III, 149.

3. Idem, ibid., 187-188.



Almost all of the critics so far considered have agreed that although poetry has been sadly abused, yet its true end is instruction and the regulation of good manners. In this commonplace idea, Sir Richard Blackmore agrees with Jonson, Milton, Dryden, and other critics whom we have already considered. He observes that the Athenians recognizing the powerful influence of poetry, early allied it with their government and religion. The stage was authorized to teach the people proper ideas of deities and divine providence, and to inspire a supreme reverence for them. Poets were looked upon as divine, because of the offices they performed. In considering the moral effect of the different literary types, the physician-criticaster takes the attitude that tragedy frightens men from vice: comedy renders them ridiculous in their evil doings, while satire exposes wrong and corrects it through raillery. Odes were originally intended for the praise of the gods and heroes, to lead men to admire and imitate virtue and heroism. Epic poetry more than all other kinds conduces to the teaching of virtue because of the dignity of the character, the fable, the action, and even the episodes. In it fortitude, wisdom, piety, moderation, and generosity, as well as all other princely virtues may be recommended at the greatest advantage. Vice may be as strongly discouraged.

To give pleasure and delight, Blackmore continues, is only a subordinate end of poetry. A poet who uses his wit in opposition to religion, virtue, and good manners is rightly to



be reproached and condemned. Poets have basely perverted the original purpose of the stage and used it to the detriment and injury of religion; many characters are employed by the poets for this very purpose of making religion ridiculous. Some poets desire to excuse themselves on the plea of the degeneracy of the age. This cannot be a legitimate excuse, for to please is not the chief end of poetry, and "'tis a mighty Dishonour and Re-proach to any man that is capable of being useful to the World in any Liberal and Virtuous Profession, to lavish out his Life and Wit in propagating Vice and Corruption of Manners, and in battering from the Stage the strongest Entrenchments and the best Works of Religion and Virtue.....Such a one is more hateful as an ill Man than valuable as a good Poet. The great Enemy of Mankind, notwithstanding his Wit and Angelick Faculties, is  
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the most odious Being of the whole Creation."

But in every respect, the most important critic of the period if John Dryden, by some often considered the father of English literary criticism. He loved poetry and was always delighted with good literature. As a critic he broke away from the fetters of old dogmas and principles, and while others of his time were cramped and hindered in their effort, he wrote with an unusual spirit and freedom. His critical essays have retained their original freshness and have suffered little in the changing of literary standards.

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1. Sir Richard Blackmore, Preface to Prince Arthur,  
Springarn III, 233.



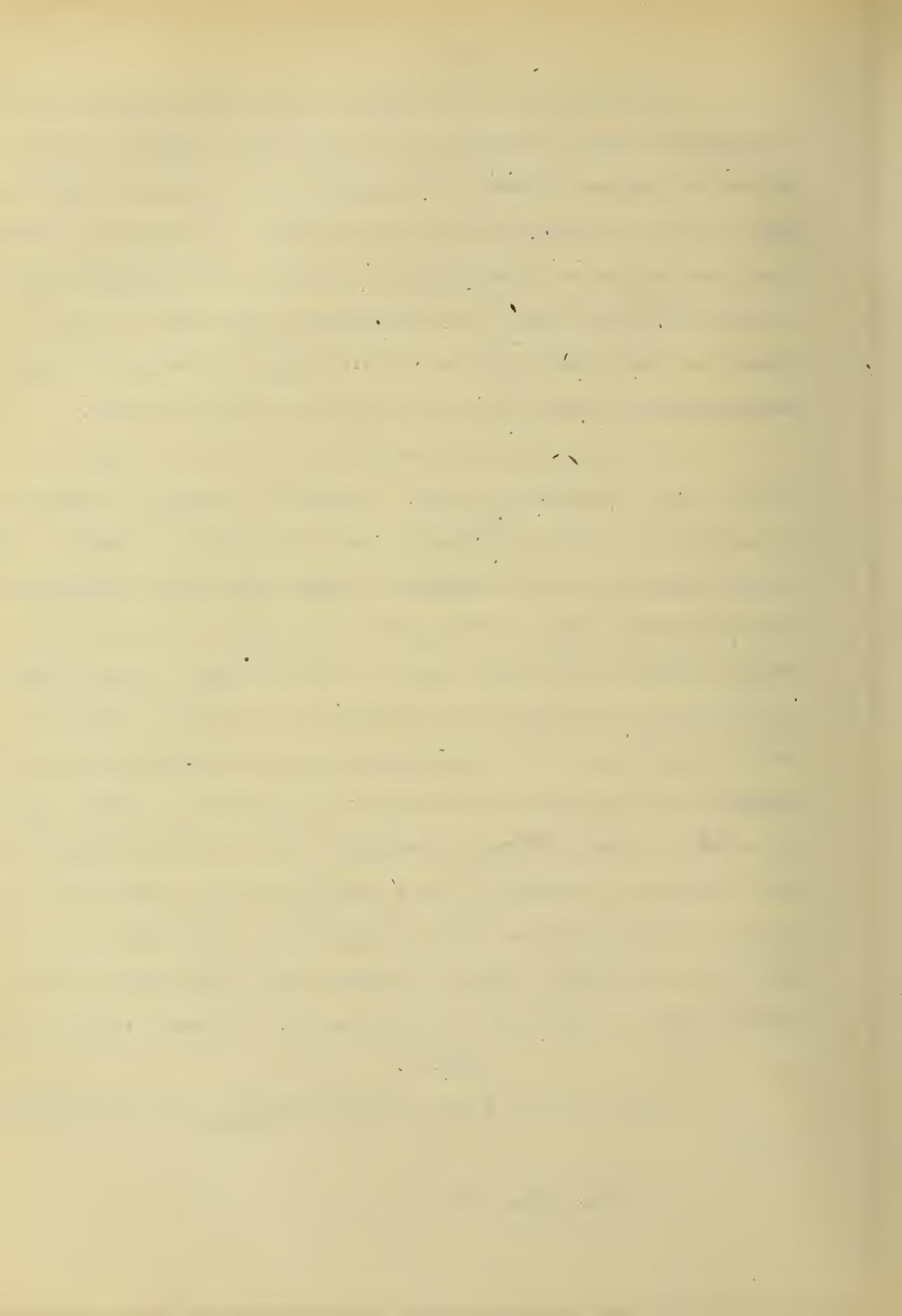
Dryden admired the classic poets, but instead of blindly following them as guides, he as Corneille, sought to find some compromise between freedom and authority. He adopted the theory that to instruct delightfully is the end of all poetry. Since there are no perfect characters in nature, and allowance should be made for human frailty in the persons who appear in the drama; yet the good qualities should always outweigh the bad, the weaknesses occasioning pity and the evil punishment.

In criticising the ancients he does not forget to notice their religious beliefs. Lucretius, he says, aimed more to instruct in moral philosophy than to delight or please. He tried to make his patron Memmius a materialist and a disbeliever in an invisible power which governs the world. In fact, Lucretius was so much of an atheist that he forgot to be a poet.<sup>1.</sup> His conception concerning the mortality of the soul seems to Dryden absurd; and the taking away of the expectation of future rewards and punishment is in itself an incentive to evil. Nothing else is strong enough to restrain men from vice and no man will maintain an integrity and a regard for duty when he may with impunity transgress the bonds of morality. The morals of Horace are of the epicurean type and he made use of the gods and Providence only to serve his turn in poetry.<sup>2.</sup> Homer "stirs up the

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1. W. P. Ker, Essays of John Dryden, Preface to Sylvae, I, 260.

2. Idem, ibid, 266.



irascible appetite, as our philosophers call it; he provokes to murder, and the destruction of God's images; he forms and equips those ungodly man-killers, whom we poets, when we flatter them, call heroes; a race of men who can never enjoy quiet in themselves till they have taken it from all the world.<sup>1.</sup>

Leaving the ancients, Dryden turns to the consideration of Spenser and Milton, both of whom have the learning and genius to make them perfect poets: but Spenser lacks uniformity of design and does not confine himself to one action; and Milton's subject, the losing of our happiness, is not a suitable subject for an epic poem. There is an abundance of machinery, but only to real persons. Then, when he comes to some Scriptural theme, his thought runs on for a hundred lines or more in a very flat and commonplace manner.<sup>2.</sup>

After observing the faults of a number of the moderns, he enquires whether they are inferior to the ancients, and if so, why. Some believe that they are, and attribute the fault to the Christian religion which is not capable of the same adornment and embellishment as the heathen religion. The virtues of a Christian, they explain, consist in patience and endurance, not in the attempt of any great and heroic achievements. Humility and resignation do not lead to the accomplishment of any great worldly honor. Yet these are really the private and personal virtues of a Christian, while in a magistrate or king there

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1. Ibid., Dedication of Examen Poeticum, II, 13.

2. A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire, Ibid., II, 28-29.



is expected the exercise of braver, power, and strong command. There are great adventures to be undertaken for the common good or for the cause of Christianity. Therefore, if a poet has the same talent and genius, he may approach the dignity of the ancients, limited only by the barbarism of our modern age.

There is another and greater objection to the introduction of the Christian beliefs into poetry offered by the French critic, Boileau,--that the machines of our Christian religion are not strong enough to support the epic poem so well as those of the heathen religion did; that the gods were discernibly interested in the contests among mortals, condescending to interpose their favour, counsels, and commands. The lack of any visible, supernatural powers among the moderns is evident in contrast with the array of gods, nymphs, and spirits which the ancients employ. "Consequently, what pleasure, what entertainment can be raised from so pitiful a machine, where we can see the success of the battle from the very beginning of it; unless that, as we are Christians, we are glad that we have gotten God on our side to maul our enemies when we cannot do the work ourselves?"<sup>2</sup>

To this argument of Boileau's Dryden replies that the trouble is due not to the Christian religion but to a manifest defect in writers. "Christian poets have not hitherto been acquainted with their own strength. If they had searched the Old Testament as they ought, they might there have found the machines which are proper for their work and those more certain in their



effect that it may be the New Testament is, in the rules sufficient for salvation. The perusing of one chapter in the prophecy Daniel, and accomodating what there they find with the principles of Platonic philosophy, as it is now Christianized, would have made the ministry of angels as strong an engine, for the working up of heroid poetry, in our religion, as that of the Ancients has been to raise theirs by all the fables of their gods, which were only received for truths by the most ignorant and weakest

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of the people." Since the doctrine of good spirits or guardian angels is almost universally received and these genii may be used in epic poetry very advantageously; and since the purposes of God are known to none, these ministers of His are likely, through their ignorance, to oppose each other to some extent and cause enough disturbance to make an interesting fable. In addition to these there are evil spirits who contend with the good. By their force and cunning they may circumvent and deceive both the good spirits and human beings, thus giving more complications.

This kind of machinery seems reasonable to Dryden and he gives it, he says, as "a rude draught of what I have been long labouring in my imagination, and what I have intended to have put in practice, (though far unable for the attempt of such a poem), and to have left the stage, (to which my genius never much inclined me), for a work which would have taken up my life

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l. Ibid., II, 34.



In the performance of it."

In his use of machines, Dryden states, Virgil imitated Homer. He sometimes employed the gods in performing things which ordinarily might have been done without them. Nevertheless, they amused the people and encouraged a belief in the probability of things which would otherwise appear as incredible. Then it pleased the Romans to believe that the gods had been interested in their ancestors. We, who believe in another and superior form of religion, are not so different in temper from the Romans since we like to believe that all good things which come to us are occasioned by God's interest in us and the care which he provides for us through the guardian angels.  
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We may well conclude the discussion of this great critic with his statement of his own final practice and attitude in regard to some of the tendencies we have been noticing:

"In general I will only say that I have written nothing which savours of immorality or profaneness; at least I am not conscious of any such intention. If there happen to be found an irreverent expression or a thought too wanton, they are crept into my verses through my inadvertency: if the searchers find any in the cargo, let them be staved or forfeited, like counterbanded goods; at least let their authors be answerable for them, as being but im-

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1. Ibid., p. 38.

2. Ibid., II, 110.



ported merchandise, and not of my own manufacture. On the other side, I have endeavored to choose such fables, both ancient and modern, as contain in each of them, some instructive moral."

1.2.

While his plays frequently pander to the baser element of the court, Dryden is important in our consideration here for his emphasis of the divine nature of poetry, for his discussion of the machinery of the gods and for his discountenancing of profanity and irreligion in plays; all of which principles involve him to some extent in the stage controversy which was again renewed during this period. At all times there has been among a certain class of English people a deep rooted hostility to the theatre. We have noticed the attack by Stephen Gosson in 1579 and Prynne's elaborate scourge in 1632. A great many critics of the seventeenth century discussed the stage in regard to its poetry and the relation of the drama to morals: but the first important attack and the one which had the greatest influence was that which began with the publication of Jeremy Collier's Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, in 1698. Collier wrote at a time when the theatre had reached its limit of immorality, when a play could not be pop-

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1. Preface to the Fables, *ibid*, II, 250.

2. This was written in 1700 after the attack of Collier when Dryden had freed himself from the influence of his corrupt times. He wishes that he might make the same statement in regard to his former writings.



ular unless it savoured of indecency, and when women, bent upon attending plays, but having a few remaining sparks of modesty, found it necessary to wear masks. Enraged with conditions, Collier forced himself into the arena and fought vigorously and courageously. He attacked the English dramatists, particularly contemporary writers. Neither great nor small escaped him, and Dryden and Congreve received due measure with D'Urfey. Though intensely indignant, Collier relies not alone upon his own intellect and emotions, but reinforces his opinions with references and citations from the ancients.

Collier begins his book with the well work statement that the business of plays is to recommend virtue and to dis- countenance vice. Poetry originated among the pagans whose religion embraced much of iniquity. Even the gods were examples of vice, and naturally poetry which was invented in part for their praise is tinctured with lewdness and immorality. The characters of the deities of a people and the effect of their conception of future rewards and punishments invariably color their poetry. Furthermore to mingle vice with music and verse as they did increases its capacity for mischief, by making it appeal more strongly to the fancy and imagination.

The particular vices of the stage are cursing and swearing, together with the abuse of religion and Scripture. Swearijg is a breach of manners which even a civil atheist will forbear. Shakespeare is comparitively free from the fault, Jonson is more so, while Beaumont and Fletcher permit only the



most degenerate persons to swear, and then reprove them for it. Their oaths are none of them so full of hell and defiance as those in more modern and contemporary plays. It is a nefarious practice; and "what can be more insolent and irreligious than to bring in God to attest our trifles, to give securities for our follies and to make part of our diversion?"<sup>1.</sup>

The characters of the heathen gods, Collier says, were not without stain and their worshippers had no belief in future rewards and punishment, yet the plays of the ancients are much more blameless in respect of profanity and irreligion. The Greek chorus commended piety and virtue, threatening destruction to the proud and irreligious. Socrates, indeed, allows Philocrates to rail against the gods, but he is afterwards made to repent and pray to them. The plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles are pure and free from profanation and give pleasurable instruction. In modern plays, not only is swearing tolerated, but Providence and religion are made ridiculous. The resurrection is treated indifferently. Baptism and the catechism are made subjects of sport. A Christian is represented as an unfit person for a friend because he forgives too easily after being injured. The Authorities of religion are weakened and sacred history burlesqued. The Bible and its doctrines are booted off

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1. Jeremy Collier, A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, London, 1698, p. 58.



the stage. Because of the resulting evil effect upon society, should not profaneness be banished from the stage. Is there no diversion without insulting the God that made us, the goodness that would save us and the power that can damn us?"<sup>1.</sup>

Not only are religion and the Bible abused on the stage, Collier contends, but clergymen are misrepresented and made ridiculous. It is a rare diversion to see an actor dressed as a minister, railing, cursing, swearing, drinking, and quarelling. Excepting the English, no other stage in Europe entertains an audience in this manner. The clergy should be held in esteem for three reasons: first, because of their relation to God; second, because of the importance of their office; and third, because they have a right to the respect which they have had everywhere and in all times. Because of their close relation to divinity, to hold the clergy in contempt, is to defy God. Again, the clergy, representing the functions and authorities of religion have a great influence upon society since religion is really the basis of society and government.

Collier goes on to argue that dramatists commonly make their chief characters vicious and then reward them at the end of the play. The favorites are immoral, atheistical, or both, and the reason of the profaneness and obscenity of the stage and their hellish cursing and swearing, and in short of their great industry to make God and goodness contemptible is all to satisfy the company and make people laugh."<sup>2.</sup>



Collier then proceeds to apply his principles and takes up for illustrations of the irreligious and demoralizing tendencies, Dryden's Amphytrion and his King Arthur, Vanbrugh's Relapse or Virtue in Danger, and D'Urfey's Don Quixote. I shall quote part of the denunciation of Prince Arthur to show the characteristic manner of Collier:

"Now here is a strange jumble and Hotch protch of Matters, if you mind it. Here we have Genii, and Angels, Cupids, Syrens, and Devils; Venus and St. George, Pan and the Parson, the Hell of Heathenism, and the Hell of Revelation; A fit of Smut, and then a jest about Original Sin. And why are Truth and Fiction, Heathenism and Christianity the most Serious and the most Trifling Things blended together and thrown into one Diversion? Why is all this done unless it be to ridicule and whole, and make one as incredible as the other? His Airy and Earthy Spirits discourse of the first state of Devils, of their Chief, of their Revolt, their Punishment, and Impostures. This Mr. Dryden very Religiously calls a Fairy way of Writing, which defends only on the Force of Imagination. What there is the Fall of the Angels a Romance? Has it no basis of Truth, nothing to support it but strength of Fancy, and Poetic Envention?.....Is the History of Tophet no better prov'd than that of Styx? Is the Lake of Brimstone and that of Phlegeton alike dreadful? And have we as much reason to believe the Torments of Titius and Prometheus, as those of the Devils and Damn's? These are lamentable consequences



To droll upon the Vengeance of Heaven, and the Miseries of the Damn'd, is a fad instance of Christianity!...To see Hell thus play'd with is a mighty Refreshment to a lewd Conscience, and a byass'd Understanding. It tends only to debach Mankind, and shake the Securities of Civil Life."<sup>1.</sup>

To strengthen his arguments, throughout Collier calls in the testimony of pagan philosophers of the primitive church, and of the ancient states. Unwilling to cease his argument, he gives one last objection to the stage, namely, that it encourages revenge.<sup>2.</sup> On the whole, he thinks that there is "nothing more disserviceable to probity and Religion than the management of the stage. It cherishes those passions and rewards, those vices which 'tis the business of reason to discountenance, strikes at the root of principle, draws off the inclinations from virtue and spoils good education.<sup>3.</sup> Sometimes the force of argument, the grace of God and the anguish of affliction may destroy the prejudice and appeal to the soul of the person who is enamoured of the theatre, but the case is extremely dangerous.

Collier's book met with great success. It gave definite and formal statement to the strong and sincere religious force which had been so largely repressed since the Restoration, so that many became ashamed that they had ever enjoyed such plays. Men of serious minds were rejoiced that he had expressed himself

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1. Ibid., p. 238.
2. Ibid., p. 287.
3. Ibid., p. 288.



so forcefully and effectively against vices which had long been repellent to them. The king rescinded an ineffective act which had been previously passed against "plays contrary to religion and good manners", and ordered the master of the revels to examine new plays before licensing any.

The attack upon contemporary dramatists provoked several replies. Dryden makes his answer in the preface to the Fables, where we have already noticed his final attitude toward morality and religion, and where he confesses to former faults. In the conclusion, Dryden summarizes his answer thus:

"I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine, which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness, or immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes not me to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one. Yet it were not difficult to prove that in many places he has perverted my meaning by his glasses and interpreted my words into blasphemy and bawdry, of which they were not guilty. I will not say, the zeal of God's house has eaten him up; but I am sure it has devoured some good part of his manners and civility. It might also be doubted, whether it were altogether zeal which prompted him to this rough manner of



proceeding; perhaps, it became not one of his functions to rake into the rubbish of ancient and modern plays : a divine might have employed his pains to better purpose, than in the nastiness of Plautus and Aristophanes, whose examples, as they excuse not me, so it might be possibly supposed that he would read them not without some pleasure.....

Neither has he judged impartially betwixt the former age and us. There is more bawdry in one play of Fletcher's, called The Custom of the Country than in all ours together. Yet this has been often acted on the stage, in my remembrance. Are the times so much more reformed now than they were five-and-twenty ago? If they are, I congratulate the amendment of our morals. But I am not to prejudice the cause of my fellow poets though I abandon my own defence: they have some of them answered fro themselves; and neither they nor I can think Mr. Collier so formidable an enemy that we should shun him. He has lost ground, at the latter end of the day, by pursueing his point too far, like the Prince of Conde, at the battle of Senneph: from unmoral plays to no plays, ad Abusu ad usum, non valet consequentia. 1.2  
But being a party, I am not to erect myself into a judge."

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1. Essays, II, 272-273.

2. In the Epilogue to Fletcher's Pilgrim he again refers to the censure he had received from Collier:

"Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far,  
When with our theatre he waged a war,



The impetuous William Congreve did not receive Collier's attack with so much grace as had Dryden, but made an angry in the Amendment of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations. Congreve's arguments were not strong enough to meet the attack and to enlist the sympathy of the public which had already been gained by Collier. He defended himself like a lawyer, who though enraged, had no confidence in his case, and did not know how to recognize his own faults, or to exonerate himself. He imagined many ridiculous subterfuges, for which Collier had most ready replies. He is very antagonistic in his manner as is shown in the beginning of his defense where he states that he has detected Collier's malice and ignorance, and that the attacks against the stage are but demonstrations of his own impurity. He tries to justify the presentation of common vices in comedy by his own construction of the old argument that the end of comedy is to instruct and to please. He advocates that men may be warned and diverted by the same action. Again, Congreve argues that the sentiments of the characters are not to be construed as those of the author, for the dramatist is not so closely identified with his work. His purpose is only to represent and foolish persons. Then comes the personal thrust that some things appear profane because seen through a profane medium. Finally, he declares that after the play is over, and

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He tells you that this very moral age

Received the first inflection from the Stage:

But sure a banish'd Court, with lewdness fraught,

The seeds of open vice, returning brought."



the delight has ceased, care is generally taken to sum up the moral and impress it upon the minds of those in the audience. The fallacies of his arguments are very evident and need no comment.

Collier has accused Congreve's plays of all the four offences of immodesty, profaneness, abuse of clergy, and encouragement of immorality; and in the Amendment he tries to answer in order those accusations. He also accuses Collier of giving some imperfect quotations and of misconstruing others. In regard to the clergy, he sees a clear distinction between the man and his office. To expose an offensive clergyman is to vindicate the office. But if anyone has tried to expose both the priest and his office to ridicule, he should rightly be condemned together with his play. Again, he pauses to indulge in a personal reflection against his opponent. "As the outward form of godliness is hypocrisy, which very often conceals irreligion and immorality, so is wit also very often an hypocrisy, a superficies glazed upon false Judgment, a good face set on a bad understanding."

Coming back to his subject, Congreve says that he thinks much of the trouble has come from confounding the drama with early spectacles. In the early days of Christianity these were so full of heathen rites and practices that Christians

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i. William Congreve, Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, London, 1698, p. 95.



were rightly forbidden to attend. However, these cannot be quoted against the usages of the modern theatre.

Sir John Venbrugh also undertook to answer the attack. His reply was not so violent as Congreve's, and his attitude was more like that of Dryden. He was able to detect one or two mistakes in Collier's work, but on the whole, his defence lacks any warmth or spirit.

Collier replied to Congreve and Vanbrugh in a Defence of the Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage; "for contest was his delight; he was not to be frightened from his purpose or his prey."<sup>1.</sup> He defended with such feeling and conviction that public sympathy allied itself with him. Congreve was forced to correct expressions and Vanbrugh made over parts of his play where a priest had been used.<sup>2.</sup>

The reply of John Dennis in Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion is more important than those of Congreve and Vanbrugh. Dennis thinks that in his attack, Collier does not show the meakness of a Christian or the reasoning of a man of sense, but this is as far as ne indulges in anythng personal. He believes that the stage contributed to the happiness and well being of mankind.

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1. Samuel Johnson, Lives of the Poets, Works, London, 1825, III, 631.

2. Alexander Beljame, Les Public et Les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre au Dix-Huitieme Siecle, Paris, 1897.



Happiness is due to passion, but the passion must be so elevated as to be in harmony with reason. This harmonious elevation the drama brings about in its highest degree. The English people, being exact, morose, and scrupulous in giving way to the passions, stand very much in need of the drama to make them happy. Furthermore, "the drama in its purity....most of necessity make men virtuous", "because it moderates the passions, whose excesses cause their vices", "and because it instructs them in their duties, both by its fable and by its sentences."<sup>1.</sup> Corruption of manners could not be occasioned by it, but only by by its abuses. Yet the fact is that it is corruption of manners which occasions the abuses of the stage, because the poets feel themselves themselves to honor the depraved tastes of the people. It is agreed that "as the Christian religion contains the best, nay the only means to bring men to eternal happiness, so for the making men happy even in this life, it surpasses all philosophy; but if the stage were arrived at that degree of purity, to which in a little while it may easily be brought, the frequenting of our theatres would advance religion, and consequently the happiness of mankind, and so become a part of the Christian duty."<sup>2.</sup> Belief in the existence of a god, in Providence, in the immortality of the soul, and in future re-

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1. John Dennis, Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind to Government, and to Religion, London, 1698, p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 47.



wards and punishments is taught by the dramatists. Machines which are the very and soul of poetry rest upon a belief in God and Providence. The doctrine of poetic justice supposes the immortality of the soul as well as future rewards and punishments. The drama also teaches one his duty toward God, his neighbor, and himself. It thus admirably prepares a man for religion.

Dennis, in the main agrees with Collier that there are abuses on the stage, and very serious ones; it is only when Collier attacks the drama that Dennis very sanely takes issue with him. The arguments of Dennis are, however, in a measure fallacious, and his conclusion savours too much of personal inclination.

Thomas D'Urfey attempted by a preface and song to defend himself against Collier's attack. <sup>1</sup> Edward Fisher, Arthur Bedford, <sup>2</sup> James Drake, <sup>3</sup> Peter Motteaux, <sup>4</sup> Elkanah Settle, and others continue the controversy for several years; but we

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1. A Defence of Plays, or the Stage Vindicated.
2. A Serious Remonstrance in behalf of the Christian Religion against the Horrid Blasphemies and Impieties which are still used in English Playhouses. In this work he recounts a number of Scripture verses travestied in plays. He found seven thousand immoral sentiments in his examinations of the plays written four years previous.
3. The Antient and Modern Stages Reviewed.
4. Discourse of the Lawfulness and Unlawfulness of



shall not follow its progress any further, since this would carry us through almost the first quarter of the eighteenth century and still accomplish nothing to our purpose. The outcome of the controversy was really decided by the end of the century, and its effect upon literature was soon evident, because Collier had assuredly the best of the argument, and his work marks the beginning of a reformation in dramatic literature. Forced by the change in public opinion and taste, authors were compelled to purify their productions or retire. Dennis, following up the prevailing moral and religious tendency of the times, enlisted himself in the reformation of poetry. His chief critical work was The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry, written in 1701. This, together with the Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, which appeared three years later, is an attempt to show the great assistance which the Christian religion offers to poetic excellence.

But to return to Collier and his immediate influence, the unanimity of approbation which he received was so strong that William III wished to forget that he was his political enemy and freed him from all legal pursuit on that account. The king renewed with insistence the orders given by him in 1697 to suppress plays which contained immoral or irreligious passages. Societies for the promotion of morals sprang up, and

Plays, lately written in French of Father Caffaro. This was prefixed to his tragedy Beauty in Distress, June, 1698.



many people were enlisted in the crusade. These tendencies toward the reformation of the drama; and on her accession to the Anne recommended the greatest reserve both in the composition and in the presentation of dramas. The seed sown by Collier germinated and took root in the minds of the people. Greater results in the purification of the drama came about by free will than could have been secured through the legislation and punishments. The theatres renounced their old errors and plays continued to be modified until they reached the standard of those of Steele and Addison.

On the other hand, inspired by an admiration of the theatre of the Restoration and by a disdain of Collier, some thought that the drama had been amended too much. Indeed, if the decision had been left to Collier and his friends, the English theatre would have practically come to an end and a return to Puritanism would have been welcomed. Some already spoke of suppressing the theatre, and if their extreme opinions had prevailed, England would have recoiled almost a century. In their honesty and rigor and opposition to aesthetic morals, they would again have compromised everything for conscience and religion. Those who were refused innocent pleasures would have cast themselves into questionable ones, for human liberty restrained leads to profligacy. The final result would have been another Restoration, had not Addison saved the day by uniting the qualities of the Puritans and of the Cavaliers. He held the same sentiments as Collier but directed them in more moderate ways. He tried to prove to the Puritans and other



serious minded people that good manners and intellectual pleasures are not incompatible with religion. He succeeded in creating a standard which both sides accepted. He came to hold a greater authority than any English writer up to his time; and by his tact, persuasion, charm, and sympathy, he did immeasurable service to literature.

We have endeavored to trace historically the rise and development of the religious tendency in the English literary criticism of the seventeenth century, together with its influences upon literature itself. We have shown the presence of the religious element from the very beginning of English literary criticism. Coming down to the latter part of the sixteenth century, when questions of rhetoric and of versification were engrossing the critics, we have seen that in contrast with the anti religious tendencies of Renaissance criticism, English criticism became somewhat religious in temper. With the growth of Puritanism and with the rise of new religious parties in England; literature and the accompanying literary criticism became more religious in tone. The first part of the seventeenth century witnessed the beginning of what may, with some apology, be termed modern literary criticism in England, when Bacon and Jonson, together with Fletcher,



Chapman, Peacham, Reynolds, and other minor critics modified and transformed the traditions of Elizabethan criticism, giving to them added historic and scientific value, and shifting the interest from the subjective to the external and objective side of literature. These men added the weight of their influence and authority to the embodiment of religious elements in literature. Then in the Commonwealth Period Cowley, Davenant, and Milton re-emphasized the ideas of the divine origin of poetry, of the sacred office and function of the poet and of the suitability of Scriptural themes as subjects of poetry. Among the ideals brought over by the Restoration, the controversy concerning the relative merits of the ancients and the moderns. This, besides calling up again the question of the divine attributes of poetry, involved the problem of the machinery of the gods which engaged many of the critical minds of the period and added strength to the religious elements already embodied in English literary criticism. Temple, Rymer, and Dryden were among the critics who contributed to the religious tendencies in literature and in literary criticism. Collier, Congreve, Dennis, and Dryden were prominent participants in the stage controversy at the end of the century. All through the century there had been some criticism of the drama on religious ground, but in this last outburst of the century all the latent vigor of hostility was let loose. Religious ideals in literature had been gaining toward the end of the century and the effect of this final controversy was to help usher in a purer and more religious temper in literature. Consequent



upon this was an increase in the religious tendencies in literary criticism, when there was scarcely any literary criticism, but touched upon religion. Thus we have endeavored to trace from its beginnings in the latter part of the sixteenth century down to the close of the seventeenth century the religious tendencies embodied in English literary criticism. We leave our subject just at the point where these tendencies are beginning for the first time to effect to a great extent literary creation.



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